Concept Note: Expert Group Meeting (online)

Human Rights Cities: Cities where young people and older persons thrive together

12 November 2026, 10:00 -12:00 & 16:00 - 18:00 East Africa Time

Organized by: UN-Habitat; TBC

1. Background and objective of the meeting

1.1 Background

As part of UN-Habitat's discussions on human rights cities for all, this Expert Group Meeting contributes to ongoing efforts to advance human rights-based approaches to urban development. Recognizing that sustainable cities integrate human rights across all aspects of local governance, this discussion will focus on advancing the rights of children, youth and older persons in all their diversity. The meeting will bring together national and local authorities, children, caregivers, youth, older persons and representative organizations, activists, urban professionals and UN personnel for a two-part virtual session on approaches, policies and practices across all levels of governance. From grassroots initiatives to local and national government action, participants will explore how cities can promote intergenerational inclusion and life-course approaches as part of creating Human Rights Cities where young people and older persons can thrive and contribute to community life.

As of 2025, more than 4.4 billion people live in cities, accounting for over half of the world's population, a share projected to reach nearly 70 per cent by 2050.[1] At the same time, the world is home to 1.3 billion youth aged 15-24,[2] with more growing up in urban areas than ever before. More than one billion children are living in urban areas [3] and an estimated one billion older persons living in cities, with urban ageing accelerating rapidly, particularly in developing countries.[4] Despite their growing presence in cities, children, youth and older persons continue to experience interconnected urban exclusion across their life course. Over 350 million children reside in slums and informal settlements,[5] while millions face extreme poverty and climate-related risks.[6] Youth often encounter barriers to decent work,

[1] UN-Habitat, World Cities Report 2024
[2] United Nations (2026). World Population Highlights 2026: Youth. UN DESA/POP/2026/TR/NO. 13. New York: United Nations.
[3] UNICEF, Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings 2022
[4] World Health Organization, "Ageing" (WHO Health Topics), accessed 13 January 2026. Available on: https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing#tab=tab_1.
[5] UNICEF, Strategic Note on UNICEF's Work for Children in Urban Settings 2022
[6] UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an urban world; The State of the World's children 2025 - Ending Child Poverty: Our shared imperative

affordable housing, services and meaningful participation, with young women disproportionately affected.[7] Older persons, despite their significant contribution to urban economies, care and community life, frequently face inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate services, isolation and discrimination.[8] These challenges particularly affect older women,[9] who are more likely to live alone,[10] lack contributory pensions and face insecure tenure.[11]

These patterns of exclusion are not incidental, but reflect systemic shortcomings in public policy, urban planning, design and budgeting that fail to integrate human rights, universal design and social inclusion. These challenges are compounded by limited age-and-sex-disaggregated data, which constrains evidence-based policymaking, monitoring and accountability. Therefore, solutions that promote intergenerational solidarity and integrate life-course and intersectional perspectives can be more effective and sustainable than age-siloed interventions. For example, cities facing shortages of both childcare and care services for older persons may benefit from more integrated care systems, while public spaces and mobility networks designed for children, caregivers and older persons tend to be safer and accessible for all residents. Rather than treating children, youth and older persons as separate constituencies, an intergenerational approach recognizes their shared interests and interdependence, while responding to the distinct needs and contributions of each age group.

Care is a core component of intergenerational solidarity because it connects generations throughout the life course. In many contexts, older women care for grandchildren as well as ageing family members, often while needing support themselves[12], while young people make up a significant share of workforce on which health, care and social services for an ageing population depend. Treating care as a shared responsibility, while building on existing family and community networks, can support well-being across generations and create opportunities for greater understanding and social cohesion.

In light of these challenges, a growing number of cities have moved towards becoming "human rights cities": cities that integrate international human rights norms and principles into all aspects of local governance, ensuring that laws, policies, services and practices promote equality, dignity, autonomy and participation for all residents across the life course.[13] The specific Human Rights Cities approach provides an overarching framework

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[7] ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures (Geneva, 2024).

[8] United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons*, A/HRC/48/53, 4 August 2021. Available on: https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/53

[9] United Nations, World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World (UN DESA, 2023). Figures are for 2021.

[10] UN DESA, Policy Brief No. 186, "Gender matters in an ageing world: the case for gender-responsive policies" (February 2026).

[11] Commission on the Status of Women, Ministerial round table on "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all older women": Chair's summary, E/CN.6/2026/10, para. 7.

[12] E/CN.6/2026/10, paras. 4 and 9.

[13] See, for example: OHCHR and UCLG, *Guidance framework for creating a Human Rights City*, 2025. Available on:

that brings together intergenerational priorities within a comprehensive rights-based model of local governance.[14] These efforts are increasingly being reinforced through the Human Rights Cities catalytic initiative of the Global Alliance for Human Rights.[15] Other examples include the World Health Organization's Age-friendly Cities and Communities[16] initiative, UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities[17] initiative and UN-Habitat's Her City[18], Young Gamechangers[19] and Youth 2030 Cities[20] initiatives. Ultimately, building resilient urban futures demands multi-stakeholder partnerships that embed participation, leadership and the rights of young people and older persons at the center of sustainable urban development, contributing to the potential of each and meeting age-appropriate needs of each generation.

This effort towards human rights cities is grounded in international human rights law, including the rights to adequate housing, equality and non-discrimination, participation and accessibility.[21] It aligns with the principles of the New Urban Agenda, which recognizes both the opportunities and challenges associated with ageing populations and the important role of children and youth in shaping more inclusive and sustainable cities. It also reflects relevant targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 11[22] on inclusive and sustainable cities and communities, as well as commitments related to reducing inequalities and promoting healthy lives and well-being at all ages.

This Expert Group Meeting also follows the Roundtable on the Rights of Older Persons as well as the Children and Youth Assembly and Roundtable, which took place at the 13th session of the World Urban Forum in May 2026. With a specific focus on the right to adequate housing, discussions called for intergenerational and intersectional approaches

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https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/aboutus/partnerships/guidance-framework-hr-city.pdf

[14] OHCHR and UCLG, *Guidance framework for creating a Human Rights City*, 2025. Available on: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/aboutus/partnerships/guidance-framework-hr-city.pdf

[15] See more here: https://www.ohchr.org/en/global-alliance

[16] WHO is specifically operating a network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which includes a guide that covers eight interconnected domains of urban life, from health care to housing and participation. See: https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/

[17] See here: https://www.childfriendlycities.org/

[18] See here: #HerCity – Let her guide you

[19] See here: Home - Young Gamechangers Initiative

[20] See here: Youth 2030 Cities - UN-Habitat Youth

[21] The discussions will therefore be grounded in the rights set out, for example, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, etc.

[22] See, for example: SDG Target 11.2 on access to safe, affordable transport, including for older persons; and SDG Target 11.7 on universal access to safe, inclusive public spaces.

to housing and neighbourhoods[23], while framing "home" as a liveable urban environment. This Expert Group Meeting aims to further investigate such approaches.

1.2 Objectives

The meeting aims to bring together national and local authorities, urban professionals, UN colleagues, and experts, alongside children, youth, and older persons and the organizations representing them. Together, participants will identify key barriers and priority concerns, including advancing an intersectional approach that also considers the distinct and at times shared barriers faced by older and younger women in their diversity, to inform the development of rights-based approaches to urban policies and practices, which create human rights cities where older persons and young people can thrive together.

3. Expected outcomes

- Improved coordination and collaboration to support systemic, rights-based responses to the needs of children, youth and older persons in urban contexts.
- A strengthened, shared understanding among participants of the lived realities of children, youth and older persons, including the shared structural barriers and normative and implementation gaps that limit the realization of their human rights, with particular focus on how these challenges manifest in urban contexts.
- A solutions-oriented exchange on how urban policies, planning and governance can better support inter-generational cities and spaces, identifying concrete entry points for action, policy improvement and institutional change at the city level.
- Develop a policy brief capturing key messages, priority concerns and recommended directions for advancing the rights of children, youth and older persons in cities, to inform future policy discussions and initiatives.
- Enable UN-Habitat in its work with Member States to promote concrete solutions to the challenges faced for young people and older persons in cities.

4. Draft agenda[24]

4.1 Segment 1 - Foundations: 10:00 – 12:00 EAT

Meeting agenda
Welcome and opening (15 min)

[23] For more information, see: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2026/05/wuf13_baku_call_to_action.pdf

[24] The EGM will take place over four hours, however the sessions will be split between a morning (relative to East Africa time) and an afternoon (relative to East Africa time) session, to accommodate different time zones. Participants may wish to attend both or either of the sessions, based on their availability. The first session will address foundational issues, while the second will analyze core themes including housing, services, and care.

Setting the scene: The experience of human rights defenders and local authorities regarding inclusion, participation and leadership, data, partnerships (45 min)
Breakout discussion: Establishing the foundations for cities where young and older persons in their diversity thrive (40 min)
Collective reflection session: The way forward (20 min)

Segment 2 – Core themes: 16:00 – 18:00 EAT

Meeting agenda
Welcome, opening and recap from previous session (15 min)
Setting the scene: The experience of human rights defenders and local authorities with core themes, namely housing, public space, access to services, care (45 min)
Breakout discussion: The core urban functions for age-responsive cities (40 min)
Collective reflection session: The way forward (20 min)