Eighty-first session of the
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

High-level thematic roundtable on regional cooperation for sustainable and resilient urban development in Asia and the Pacific

Tuesday 22 April 2025, 9:00-10:00 hours

Background

In 2019 the population of the Asia-Pacific region became, for the first time, predominantly urban. While growth rates and development contexts vary across subregions, all countries are facing pressures to effectively manage the mega-trend of urbanization. Increasing number of cities across Asia and the Pacific are seen as models of innovation, showcasing solutions in provision of basic urban services and sustainable development. However, many cities, and especially emerging urban areas, struggle with infrastructure gaps, inadequate housing and employment opportunities, and the adverse impacts of unplanned growth, unmanageable traffic, waste and pollution. Cities are often at the forefront of the climate crisis, especially given the large populations living in low-lying and coastal communities, subjected to extreme weather events, while increasing demands for urban energy make cities and local communities critical partners in transitions towards national net-zero goals.

The economic potential of cities in the region is well-acknowledged. With over 80 per cent of the region's Gross domestic product (GDP) generated in urban areas, Asia-Pacific cities have produced tremendous wealth and become powerhouses in an interconnected global economy. Still, much of the resources remain concentrated in the region's mega-cities and capitals, while significant demographic shifts are placing pressure on secondary cities and smaller urban areas with limited capacities to finance needed investments, underscoring a need for enhanced multi-level governance and better integration of national urban policies and local initiatives. Such integration is essential for countries to achieve national targets with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, requiring scale and speed of progress at the local levels.

Regional cooperation can accelerate the achievement of inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities. At both the national level and through city-to-city exchanges, regional initiatives can support sharing of knowledge and best practices, from national urban policies and planning for urban growth while sustainably managing resources, to leveraging the growing potential for smart city solutions across multiple sectors, and in engaging local stakeholders, from civil society to the private sector in localization efforts. Building the capacity of local leaders can be a significant objective of regional cooperation. The increased expectations- and need- for local authorities to implement actions to achieve the SDGs and to develop local climate actions requires coordination among various levels of government and engagement of local communities, making local official key

actors in regional cooperation efforts. Sharing expertise amongst member States can facilitate to expedite implementing proven urban solutions, while technical and policy advice leveraged from ESCAP and across the UN system can ensure future urban development contributes to a more resilient and sustainable Asia-Pacific.

Objectives

The objectives of the roundtable are to introduce the context of the urbanization megatrend in the Asia-Pacific region, identify challenges cities and communities confront as they develop and implement urban solutions, and suggest opportunities to enhance regional cooperation to effectively respond to the environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities associated with urbanization.

Speakers representing a range of stakeholders will offer perspectives on key issues critical to promoting resilient and sustainable urban development, including urban governance, national urban policies, urban planning, leveraging local actions to support national strategies and global development agendas and capacity needs. The discussion will help to frame deliberations among delegates to the Commission Session and will highlight recommendations identified in the Commission Session's theme study, ***Urban Transformation: From growth to resilience.***

Following an overview of the theme study and its recommendations by the ESCAP Executive Secretary, a keynote address will provide further context on progress towards sustainable urban development across the region, and the opportunities for regional cooperation and support from the UN system to accelerate local actions towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. A moderated roundtable discussion among stakeholders and Q&A from delegates will further highlight areas for further deliberation during the Commission Session and beyond.

Key Guiding Questions:

1. What are the initiatives that your government is undertaking to further engage local authorities and to leverage their potential to contribute to sustainable development and climate strategies? What gaps exist and what coordination mechanisms have been put in place to align national urban policies with local actions?
2. How are local authorities advancing localization efforts, and what are the most critical challenges to develop, finance and implement sustainable urban solutions, including for example, on housing, transport, pollution, climate change, or resource management?
3. Where can civil society be most effective in promoting sustainable urban development and what are some of the best practices that showcase community-based initiatives?
4. How is the private sector ensuring that development contributes to more resilient and sustainable urban development, addresses social needs and does not contribute to adverse environmental challenges, such as pollution or land degradation?
5. Where/how can regional cooperation be enhanced to engage all stakeholders and sectors in the goal of achieving resilient and sustainable urban development?

Tentative programme

CS81 High-level thematic roundtable on regional cooperation for sustainable and resilient urban development in Asia and the Pacific		
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09:00-09:12	Presentation of the findings of the theme study and announcement on the ninth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-9)	Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ESCAP
09:12-09:18	Keynote Address	Ms. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat
09:18-09:26	Special Remarks	Mr. Nga Kor Ming, Minister of Housing and Local Government, Malaysia
09:26-09:45	Roundtable Discussion	Moderated by Ms. Bernadia Tjandradewi, Secretary General, UCLG ASPAC • Mr. Powes Parkop, Governor of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea • Ms. Shinta Widjaja Kamdani, Chair of the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN), Chief Executive Officer of Sintesa Group, and Chairman of the Indonesian Employers Association (APINDO) • Ms. Lajana Manandhar, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)
09:45-10:00	Q&A and Summary	Moderator