



V T M U N C

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World Cities Forum 2025
General Assembly Committee

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Letter From the Secretariat

Dear Delegates of VTMUNC II,

We appreciate your participation and dedication to the premier Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference's efforts to promote productive and civil discourse and conversation. Nevertheless, please be warned that some presentations, discussions, and or information found in the background guides may contain delicate or triggering material. At Virginia Tech, we prioritize fostering a safe and inclusive environment, so we want to ensure that you are prepared for the nature of the discussions to occur.

That being said, the following content areas may contain sensitive material:

1. **Conflict Zones & Human Rights Violations:** Some conversations may involve sensitive global problems including human rights violations, armed conflicts, and or other difficult themes.
2. **Sensitive Cultural or Religious Topics:** Some topics may raise sensitive cultural or religious issues for individuals.
3. **Violence and Trauma:** In their speeches or resolutions, delegates may reference incidents of violence, trauma, or abuse in real-world scenarios that may potentially be a sensitive topic to delegates in committee.
4. **Discussions about Discrimination and Marginalization:** Emotionally intense discussions concerning discrimination, marginalization, or inequity may arise during committee.

As you prepare for the conference, we encourage all of our delegates to approach these discussions with both respect and empathy for differing perspectives. If the content of these committees is something that you are uncomfortable with, we recommend that you take the appropriate steps to prioritize your well-being, such as seeking support from conference staff or Secretariat of VTMUNC II. Bound by the motto Ut Prosim (That I May Serve), we serve to ensure that we will promote constructive and respectful dialogue during committee sessions. As you prepare and participate in the conference, we promise that VTMUNC II will stay committed to creating a space where all your voices are heard and are welcome. Thank you for your compassion and cooperation to our goal of respectful and intellectual discourse for all. We hope that as you progress with our conference, you continue to bloom.

Sincerely,

Shriya Chemudupati, Secretary General of VTMUNC II

Anneli Sample, Under-Secretary General of General Assemblies of VTMUNC II

Holly Johnson, Under-Secretary General of Crisis Committees of VTMUNC II

Thomas Quinn, Under-Secretary General of Specialized Agencies of VTMUNC II

Conference Guidelines

The second iteration of the Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference, otherwise known as VTMUNC II, is committed to providing a safe and pleasurable experience for all delegates, advisors, and individuals involved with VTMUNC II. Although participating in Model UN is being involved in competitive activity, its fundamental purpose is to uphold and put into practice both the principles of diplomacy, collaboration, and cooperation. Any individual that violates the policies and procedures of VTMUNC II and the ideals of an open and inclusive environment will be subject to disciplinary action from the staff of VTMUNC II; disciplinary action may include a warning or being disqualified from receiving awards. Promoting an environment that is open to all by being safe, equitable, and exhilarating is our utmost priority. In order to ensure this, the following are prohibited:

1. Any pre-writing or working on committee content outside of VTMUNC II committee sessions (as described by the Schedule of Program).
2. Any speeches, directives, crisis arcs, or actions in committee that intend to create violence or promote a violent environment to a specific group of people, including mentions of sexual violence, graphic violence, and other behavior that is beyond committee guidelines.
3. Any hate speech, written documents, or behavior that uses language that is discriminatory and disrespectful, including but not limited to any language that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, or language harmful to any specific group.
4. Any actions that are deliberate, both knowingly and intentionally, to bully, harass, or otherwise harmful behavior that may or has hurt other delegates' physical and or mental health.

Overview of General Assembly Committees

Much like the real United Nations, Congress, Parliament, and other legislative bodies, the General Assembly follows basic parliamentary procedure to promote collaboration between states, share ideas to everyone in the room, and create the most effective solutions to the world's most pressing issues. Delegates will debate what the agenda should be set to, discuss the chosen topic in depth, and write and debate solutions.

General Assembly committees are largely comprised of two types of caucuses, described below:

Moderated Caucuses: One state at a time gets the floor for a specified amount of time and directly addresses fellow delegates and the chair about a specified topic voted on by the delegates. This time is used to share ideas, argue for or against something, and move the committee in the direction the delegate wants it to go.

Unmoderated Caucuses: Delegates may move freely throughout the room and speak with each other to share ideas, form blocs, and write working papers. In double delegation committees, one delegate may stay in the room to participate in a simultaneous moderated caucus while the other leaves the room to discuss with their bloc, if the chair allows it.

Letter From the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2nd annual Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference! We are thrilled to be serving as your dais for the World Cities Forum 2025 delving into the complex and dynamic landscape of urban politics and development, and wanted to take this time to share with you our backgrounds as well as give an overview of how this committee will operate during our time together for VTMUNC II. All of us are proud alumni of Virginia Tech, and we all participated in Model UN in various capacities during our time at the university.

Nekhita Kassey graduated with dual degrees in Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Technology Management (EIT), and International Studies with a minor in Spanish in May 2024. She co-founded VTMUNC as the Director General along with Secretary General Aaryan Menon and Senior Advisor Prince Wang in February 2024. Since graduation, Nekhita has been working as a Human Resource Analyst for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, and is a candidate in the Master's of Public Administration Program at George Mason University.

Prince Wang graduated with dual degrees in Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Technology Management (EIT), and International Relations in May 2024. He co-founded VTMUNC as the Senior Advisor along with Secretary General Aaryan Menon and Director General Nekhita Kassey in February 2024. Prince is a Master's of Science candidate at Johns Hopkins University and a Teach for America 2024 candidate. He is currently teaching English Language Development and Mathematics at the Academy for College and Career Exploration in Baltimore.

Jyotsna Rathinam graduated with dual degrees in International Relations and Economics with minors in French and Data and Decisions in May 2024. She served as the head chair for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) for VTMUNC I. Jyotsna is currently a fellow at Save the Children as part of the GenNext Humanitarian Fellowship Program.

With our parents immigrating from the large urban centres of Trichy, Coimbatore, and Wuhan, this committee goes beyond an intellectual exercise, and is a personalized testimony to both the ubiquitous beauty of cities and the vertiginous cost of unregulated urban sprawl. Comparable to how each city is distinct and characteristic, our belief is that each delegate offers unique insights, contributions, and personalities to our shared space this weekend. Being experienced participants of Model UN prior to taking on this role, we believe in the power of experiential learning to spark inspiration and friendship, and encourage delegates to take advantage of the milieu that this community offers. Ultimately, the World Cities Forum mirrors the ideals and spirit of any

cosmopolitan city- to be a safe, inclusive, and equitable place where ideas and innovation flourish.

We are excited to see what you all bring to the table, and witness some creative and engaging debate this weekend. The entire Secretariat along with the chairs and staff have put in a ton of work to make this the most special experience for everyone. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or our USG of General Assemblies with any questions you have. Best of luck and we are looking forward to meeting each and every one of you!

The World Cities Forum 2025 Dais
Nekhita Kassey Co-Chair
Prince Wang Co-Chair
Jyotsna Rathinam Co-Chair

Glossary and Expectations

The World Cities Forum (WCF) 2025 convenes as an advanced committee session regarding the pressing challenges society faces with global urban development. Cities around the world will have the opportunity to showcase innovative strategies, exchange best practices, and collaborate on actionable solutions to address urbanization's most critical issues. This forum is meeting in present time, so any current and historical events that are relevant to the topic of urban affairs and development is appropriate to use in the broader context of the committee. Furthermore, think of yourselves not only as representatives for your respective cities, but stakeholders for a prosperous and globally interconnected future.

As an advanced committee, the expectations are slightly different for delegates. The specifics for what makes the WCF unique can be found below.

Definition of a City

For purposes of this committee, a city is a large permanent human settlement characterized by its population size, economic activities, governance structures, and infrastructure. It can be defined narrowly as the city proper, referring to the area within its administrative boundaries, or more broadly as an urban agglomeration encompassing contiguous urban areas and suburbs. At its largest scope, a city may be part of a **metropolitan region**, integrating multiple jurisdictions, satellite towns, and rural areas socio-economically tied to an urban core (UN Habitat).

Delegate Positions

Consistent with the name of the committee, delegates will be representing a city instead of a typical country or observer state of the United Nations. This committee will be single-delegate, as we are trying to highlight the individual contributions, differences, and skills of students in the format of an advanced committee. Since delegates are representing cities, we will be giving delegates the opportunity to be very creative with their ideas, meaning feel free to go beyond the traditional constraints of a general assembly (within reason).

Resolutions

The format and contents of resolutions will be similar to conventional resolutions (delegates may refer to our website for a style guide). However, we will be looking favorably on resolutions that contain solutions that are innovative, specific, and practical. For the WCF, delegates must understand that the contents of this background are merely a foundation for topics in their resolutions. It is an expectation that delegates find their own individualized and unique solutions to excel in this committee.

On Collaboration and the Spirit of Diplomacy

What makes a good delegate? We are looking for individuals that are thoroughly prepared to understand their city's unique challenges and strengths, those that are innovative in their approaches, and collaborative in their efforts. Delegates should be actively engaging in debate, offering creative, actionable solutions that balance local needs with global considerations. Important qualities include diplomacy, teamwork, adaptability, and the ability to foster relationships with their peers. As an advanced committee, we expect a baseline of public speaking, research, and writing skills, but we look beyond technical proficiency. We value delegates who are passionate, proactive, and committed to creating better futures for urban centers.

Context

More than half the world's population currently resides in cities. However, cities are grappling with a multitude of complex issues, made more difficult by rising global urban poverty levels in the wake of COVID-19. From rising rates of individuals living in hovels, insufficient public transport, city expansion outpacing population growth to threats of critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services by disasters, it is essential that cities are equipped to adequately handle these challenges. As the world turns more urban, with nearly 70% of the global population projected to reside in cities by 2050, critical infrastructure, affordable housing, efficient transport and essential social services are crucial for creating resilient, sustainable cities for all (Global).

UN Goals and Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The core of the agenda contains the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call to action for the global community to alter the course of human activity to create an equitable and sustainable trajectory for the future. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivation must align with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our biodiversity (Goal).



Topic A: Agenda 2030

Background and Current Situation

Topic A: Agenda 2030

Topic A is aligned with the United Nations Framework for Sustainable Development, and supported with evidence from various experts on how to achieve targets by 2030. The World City Forum specifically focuses on the role that municipalities and city governments play in creating a prosperous future for our children. Agenda 2030 looks at high-impact, short-term policy solutions that can be implemented by the year 2030, and also a framework for the years beyond. It is crucial that we create an enforceable, and internationally recognized agreement to ensure a prosperous future for generations to come.

Climate

According to international meteorological organization's such as Berkeley Earth and the United Nation's Meteorological Organization, 2024 was the hottest year to date and the first time where global temperatures rose above 1.5 celsius comparable to preindustrial standards. Climate experts from around the globe provide an overwhelmingly clear consensus that 2030 will be an inflection point for the anthropocene.



Deliberate and substantial efforts must take place in order to create a sustainable trajectory for human consumption. Throughout the committee, consider the role that cities have to play as sources of innovation, agents against climate change, and advocates for climate justice.

Carbon neutrality

Carbon neutrality can broadly be defined as when a country emits less carbon dioxide than it absorbs. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is a heat-trapping gas and chemical compound that is produced naturally and artificially. CO₂ is emphasized by climate scientists because it is the leading greenhouse gas attributed to heat being trapped in our atmosphere and subsequently global warming (Carbpm). In the past two centuries, human activities “have raised the atmosphere’s carbon dioxide content by 50%,” leading to alarming consequences such as health conditions being exacerbated, abnormal weather occurrences, and severe urban heat. According to the World Economic Forum, only eight countries in the world meet the criteria to be considered carbon neutral. These countries include Bhutan, Comoros, Gabon, Guyana, Madagascar, Niue,

Panama, and Suriname (World). However, even amongst those that are currently carbon neutral, there is a pattern of economic underdevelopment and low population rates rather than concrete steps taken to reduce CO₂. In order to holistically address the global problem of carbon emissions, we must disrupt the linkage between industrialization and environmental degradation (Carbon).

Copenhagen

Despite countries as a collective failing to meet the urgent climate needs of the future, many cities are much closer to meeting the benchmarks of climate neutrality and green planning. The City of Copenhagen (CPH) 2025 Climate Plan is a great example of the ambitious yet feasible efforts to simultaneously support carbon neutrality, population growth, and economic expansion.. The CPH 2025 Climate Plan outlines four pillars: *Energy Consumption, Energy Production, Mobility with reduced emissions, and City Administration Initiatives* (Primaer). In the year 2021, Copenhagen was able to reduce its emissions by 72.6% compared to its base year 2005. This climate plan was successful due to a combination of factors that included the incentivization of residents in the city, separation of implementation into distinct phases, and a comprehensive climate accounting system that is updated every year. Significant city funds are taken to support the sustainability of the city along with public-private partnerships with entities such as the Big Buyers Initiative, EnergyLab Nordhavn, and international collaboratives such as Carbon Neutral City Alliance (CNCA).

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is one of the leading ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition from fossil fuels, and reduce forms of pollution. It is seen to also have economic developments such as creating jobs in manufacturing, engineering, and innovation. The field of renewable energy is also a rapidly growing field that is generating investment into research and development. Although these changes are positive and create incremental steps towards combating climate change, it is still seen as a niche euphemism rather than a necessity that countries contribute to significantly on the global scale.

Reykjavik

Cities that have made notable progress in renewable energy include Reykjavik, Iceland. Reykjavik, with the government provisioning the Municipal Plan 2010-2030, is pioneering the city as an internationally leading city in renewable energy (Oban). The city is distinctly powered by geothermal energy coming from the earth's core, and hydroelectric power sourced by Iceland's abundance of melting glaciers. Reykjavik's plan is ambitious, including cutting the number of gas stations by over 50 percent, and a set goal to be completely fossil fuel-free by 2050. Geopolitically, Reykjavik and the national government of Iceland are far more directly connected than many of the other cities represented in the WCF, as over 60 percent of the

population lives in the capital city. Iceland was also the first country in the world to propose reaching 100 percent renewable energy, which they declared this intention in 1998 (Oban).



Urban Planning

Although most of these SDGs are referenced throughout this committee, it's noted to pay attention to SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities as a critical component for the WCF. The targets for SDG include access to safe and affordable housing, transport systems, inclusive and sustainable urbanization, world cultural and natural heritage, green and safe spaces, as well as mitigating death and environmental harm. Aligning with SDG 11, urban planning is distinctly at the center of these issues. Urban planning can broadly be defined as the process of designing the layout, infrastructure, systems, resources, human movement, and services of cities (Goal).

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is a crucial aspect of the dialogue within the WCF as it encompasses the physical and organizational structures that are needed for a city to function. Within the context of this committee, infrastructure can be broadly categorized into four types: soft, hard, critical, and financing of public infrastructure (Public). Soft infrastructure refers to “all the institutions that help maintain a healthy economy,” such as educational, health, financial, law, and governmental systems. Hard infrastructures are the physical systems that sustain economies such as transport systems (roads and highways) and telecommunication services (telephone lines and broadband systems). Critical Infrastructure incorporates resources such as shelter and heating, public health,

agricultural facilities, access to drinking water, and power. Finally, financing of public infrastructure includes the public (taxes), private (investment), and various urban monetary partnerships that fundraise and allocate resources to sustain infrastructure across the area of each municipality.

Munich

The city of Munich, representing the capital of the Bavarian region of Germany, maintains a robust infrastructure system that is able to effectively provide a vast array of quality services to its residents. This city captures an unemployment rate of 4.1 percent, with large corporations not only providing jobs and high purchasing power, but also supporting social services and a high quality of living. In 2023, the local government apportioned a budget of 2.3 billion in investing in school and daycare construction, affordable housing, expansion and renovation of public transportation, and climate protection measures (Global). Furthermore, the national government plays a larger role in transit funding than most countries, providing a much larger and more stable funding source to invest in the city's network. Integrated with its infrastructural initiatives, Munich as a locality has committed to ambitious and stringent climate goals that ensures a continuously improving and sustainable apparatus for its residents (Global).



Transportation

When evaluating the effectiveness of cities in sustaining growth, transportation is at the heart of this issue not only because it is how people get to work and access services, but also because it is

what connects human migration from rural to urban areas. At the core, cities serve as beacons of economic opportunity and resource accumulation, and robust transportation systems ensure greater equity for individuals to access these resources.

Hong Kong

Formerly a mere fishing village, Hong Kong rose to global prominence as a British trade port and global hub for Chinese exports. Given its extreme population density, Hong Kong was pushed to be innovative with its transportation design early-on. The city was able to develop not only one of the world's most transit dense and convenient urban transportation systems through its multi-layered networking, but one of the most profitable. Through its ingenuitive land use strategy, the city makes profit off its transit projects and has therefore been able to afford a much denser network than it otherwise would've. In addition to its density, the network has stayed ahead of the curve through innovations like the first electric double decker busses, the smart motorway traffic system, and a modern metro system totalling 22 lines (Transport).



Questions to Consider

1. What are ways we can globally create accountability measures to ensure the success of Agenda 2030?
2. How can urban centers lead initiatives to create innovative and globally applicable mechanisms to combat climate change?
3. What current or future innovative strategies can we implement to provide sustainable and accessible transportation systems to our respective metropolitan areas?
4. How can robust infrastructure systems be mutually aligned with the goals of sustainable development?
5. How can we mobilize our extremely diverse populations to create a bottom-up, people-centered approach to Agenda 2030?

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Topic B: Rags to Riches

Background and Current Situation

Across all continents, cities and urban areas are the predominant source of economic development and income generation. Hundreds of millions of people move to cities in search of opportunities and to improve their quality of living. Topic B's areas will focus on economic mobility and municipal services, two pillars of growth and equity within cities. This forum will emphasize the importance of recognizing how we can work to ensure affordability and opportunity in urban areas while operating in a global capitalist system. Asymmetric development has resulted in benefits for a select few, but at the detriment of many. This committee encourages the re-imagination of cities to support marginalized communities inhibited by cyclical poverty and lacking policies, to create societies that are more equitable and prosperous for all.

Economic Mobility

Economic mobility describes the ability to go from one economic class to another. Cities often suffer from great wealth divides and varying qualities of life. In order to ensure equitable development going forward it must be possible for equitable *opportunities* for growth to be present for those residing in urban areas. These opportunities often boil down to education, jobs, and wages. Education is the first step in economic mobility especially in urban areas which are often the centers of big businesses and white collar jobs. In order for cities and people to develop, so do education systems. Providing well developed curricula and affordable education can make or break a child's future and access to jobs, income, and social connections. While cities are often thought of as hubs for employment, due to housing crises and lack of transportation, jobs are becoming increasingly more difficult to get. Therefore, these issues must be solved in order to provide citizens with the ability to live and thrive. Lastly, wages are also a consistent issue within cities as prices are often higher and many workers not included in the traditional formal economy are not protected. An issue as multifaceted as economic mobility required multifaceted and innovative solutions to create a prosperous future for all.

Education

Education plays a crucial role in economic mobility, especially in urban areas where the job market is dominated by white collar jobs. Unfortunately, in many countries education is unaffordable. Particularly, higher education remains a financial burden. While public subsidies are often thought of to resolve this issue, OECD data shows a tradeoff between the amount of public subsidies for higher education and the percentage of the public who hold bachelor's

degrees due to the often increased competitiveness to obtain degrees (Steele). Ergo, it is critical to consider not just funding but accessibility when considering higher ed.

Primary education, on the other hand, while nearly universalized in the past decade, is still inaccessible to $\frac{1}{3}$ of children in low income countries (“Primary Education”). While our forum focuses on cities, education systems often need systemic overhauls with state or nationwide support to be effective. Many successful approaches to tackling education inequality at the primary level focus on broadening education to serve more than the elite by providing catch up classes and more basic curricula (“Primary Education”).

Shanghai

While the quality of education is a large contributor to powerful education systems, equitable education, especially in urban areas which tend to have great wealth disparities, are a pivotal part of a successful education system. Shanghai leads China in education including curriculum reforms and assessments, however they have also been successful in bridging disparities between school quality. In the past decade, the Shanghai Education Commission has focused on increasing the quality of bottom-tier schools through collaboration. Higher tier and lower tier schools have been paired with each other, clustered with one another to share teaching resources, received additional funding to increase educational equity, and encouraged coordination and knowledge sharing between teachers. This approach has been incredibly successful and has led to many weaker schools significantly improving their performance (Stewart).

Estonia

Estonia, despite its size and economy, provides a great educational model for other countries and urban areas to aspire to.



Much of primary school learning incorporates interpersonal skills as much as academic skills and a wide range of subjects. Schools are also provided with universal free lunch and heavily subsidized kindergarten to encourage accessibility and attendance.

Additionally, the education system is built from

bottom up instead of centralized by the government encouraging teacher flexibility and adaptability (Saner).

European Union

The cities housed within the European Union offer a robust network of subsidized, rigorous, and competitive universities. This system integrates two essential elements of quality higher education: accessibility with affordability, with many places such as Norway and Denmark offering tuition-free status for the vast majority of students. Furthermore, a plethora of the world's leading universities, such as EPFL (Lausanne), ETH Zurich, and PSL (Paris) are all based in these municipalities. One of the main reasons for the success of these universities is the intergovernmental commitment to education. Through decades of consensus-building, funding towards high-ed became a major priority and has been secured through advocacy and various initiatives such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund (“3 Reasons for Cheaper European Degrees - King Charles College.”).

Jobs

In order to consider the positive impacts of a liveable wage, people must first find jobs, which is becoming increasingly difficult in urban areas. One of the most prominent reasons for this is the issue of transportation. This trend is especially prevalent in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. When public transportation is either not efficient, affordable, or safe, it excludes disempowered groups from accessing urban jobs. Cities have been encouraged to resolve this issue through building safe street networks as well as managing the demand for private vehicles (Tun).

Delegates should also consider the informal economy. The World Resource Institute reports that “Globally, 2 billion workers operate in the informal economy, representing 50% to 80% of the urban workforce in the global south.” In order to reduce urban inequality and bolster economic mobility, support for the informal economy is imperative (Weston).

Lastly, while big businesses often harbor their headquarters in cities, in order to reach individuals with a variety of skill sets and experiences while boosting urban employment, the support of small businesses is essential. Small businesses are known to be productive in job creation, especially in inner cities (Chen). Therefore, job accessibility, the informal sector, and small business support should be considered in job creation in urban areas.

Mexico World Heritage Cities

Following the subsequent reduction in tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mexico launched an online platform in order to support small businesses.”The platform aims to join forces to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism and cultural sectors, promote local and national tourism, and increase local SMEs' digital presence.” The website includes maps, local business descriptions, as well as promotions for loyalty programs (UNESCO).

Bhubaneswar

While many governments attempt to restrict informal vendors and workers to clear streets for formal market activity and tourists, Bhubaneswar formed a successful public-private partnership in 2011 and declared 54 vending zones with 2,600 fixed kiosks in order to build trust between local authorities and informal vendors as well as protect vendors from street harassment (Chen).



Wage and Affordability

Price to income ratio is often the measure that dictates the affordability of a city (Brooks). While the United States is famously known for their affordability crisis, this issue spans countries worldwide. There are a few root causes, including the low incomes and housing affordability .

As for income, The International Labour Organization states that “A living wage is a level of pay that gives workers and their families a decent standard of living. This includes being able to afford basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, education, transport and clothing.” Living wage is often higher than the minimum wage. Regardless, affordability is often influenced by minimum wage. Even so, there are several issues with minimum wage. The most obvious one being that only 24% of countries around the world pay a living wage. Another issue is that about 18% of countries exclude either agricultural workers or domestic workers, or both, from their minimum wage. Many global actors and various countries have come together to call for liveable wages worldwide mentioning benefits such as reduced poverty, increased productivity, and improved worker engagement. The World Economic Forum estimates that “A globally implemented living wage could generate \$4.6 trillion in additional GDP each year through increased productivity and spending,” (Masterson).

Housing affordability on the other hand has been on a steep decline since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to CBS “the crisis stems principally from land use policies that artificially restrict housing supply, driving up land prices and making homeownership unattainable for many” (Brooks). Other factors such as demand outside cities due to remote work, and price jumps due to investors looking for profit, also play a contributing role (Brooks). Examples of how housing crises are being dealt with in major cities are included in the municipal services section of the background guide.

Barcelona

In 2017, Spain launched its “B-MINCOME” experiment, guaranteeing a minimum income to 1,000 randomly selected households from some of Barcelona’s poorest districts. In the following two years, results have shown clear improvements in mental and physical wellbeing as well as economic standing and access to food (Coelho).

Houston

Houston has uniquely been able to maintain affordability despite its growth through a few key policy and regulation decisions. One of the most significant influences on Houston’s affordable housing market is the lack of zoning regulations in addition to the wide land availability.

Additionally, general expenses including groceries, utilities, are lower in Houston than most U.S. cities. A strong job market and no-state income tax also give residents additional income for expenses and housing (Salande).



Municipal Services

Globally, cities serve as population centers and major sources of local and national governance. Municipal services are broad services provided by the government to serve the general public and maintain the city’s overall functionality & safety. Examples of these services include but are not limited to housing, waste management, and healthcare. They are incredibly important to provide accessible resources to marginalized communities and support social mobility. The extent and type of municipal services available differs drastically between cities based on certain factors such as budgets, population size, geographic location, socioeconomic demographics, and priorities set by city leadership.

Part of sustainable city development is ensuring that these services are designed and implemented with long term impacts that will improve citizens’ quality of life which in turn will generate income growth and economic development. Listed below are a few key services to consider in designing resilient and thriving communities for cities.

Housing

One of the targets of SDG 11 is “by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services”(United Nations). Housing has become a critical issue as urbanization

has led to increased demands, but limited supply of housing available to the public. “24.8% of the urban population live in poor housing conditions with over 85% of that population being concentrated in Central & Southern Asia, Eastern & South Eastern Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa”(United Nations). Additionally other factors include housing costs rising faster than incomes, with the average home costing more than three times the average income (World Economic Forum); shortages of land, labour, and materials; and global crises like COVID-19 heightening inequality in housing; leaving many communities struggling to obtain affordable and sustainable housing.

Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland has created a unique social housing program called the “Housing First” initiative based on the belief that “decent, safe housing is a basic human right, and if a person does not have a stable home, it is almost impossible to make substantial improvements in other areas of life”(Dietz). The government in partnership with other organizations and municipalities turned hostels into permanent housing. The initiative also implemented scattered-site housing, allowing low-risk homeless individuals to live in regular community apartments instead of centralized shelters. This approach fosters community integration, reduces homelessness stigma, and ensures apartments meet the same standards as non-initiative housing. “According to the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, the homelessness rate in Finland has decreased by about 80 per cent since the 1980s” (Farmilo).

Singapore City

Singapore City, Singapore has created a housing policy where the majority of Singapore’s population lives in public housing provided by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) that is subsidized and accessible. One of the central aspects of the housing policy is emphasis on home ownership for middle class families. The government offers various benefits to assist home buyers such as the Central Provident Fund (CPF), a mandatory savings plan for working residents to fund their needs, subsidies & and grants such as the Additional CPF Housing Grant (AHG), and Special CPF Housing Grant (SHG). Additionally, most housing being sold is on a leasehold basis which is about 99 years, ensuring a continuous supply of land for future development and maintaining the value of public housing over time.



Healthcare

Healthcare is one of the most important issues in urban development as these areas experience rapid growth and high population density. With expansion comes challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and overwhelmed healthcare systems that were exacerbated by global crises such as COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization, In 2021, about “4.5 billion people, more than half of the global population, were not fully covered by essential health services” (WHO). Addressing these challenges requires delegates to create a comprehensive approach that includes improving access to medical facilities; prioritizing prevention, education, and social determinants of public health; and investing in strategies to prevent diseases and illness from rising in the first place. While there are many cities who can improve their healthcare system, some cities are taking significant steps to make healthcare accessible and equitable for its residents.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai, Thailand has heavily invested in its healthcare infrastructure, ensuring that both private and public hospitals are well equipped and accessible to residents. The public system provides universal health coverage to Thai citizens through programs like the Universal Coverage Scheme (UCS), the Civil Servant Medical Benefit Scheme (CSMBS), and Social Security Scheme (SSS). These programs ensure that the majority of the population has access to essential medical services. Additionally, Chiang Mai has kept costs affordable even with healthcare insurance, “for private hospitals, outpatient care starts around 1,000 baht. For public hospitals, the costs are subsidized by the government and you can pay 50% less than what you can pay for a private hospital”(999 Developments).



One of the unique aspects of Chiang Mai is that they have partnered with NEC Thailand to develop a digital healthcare platform aimed at enhancing care for the elderly and chronically ill patients, as part of broader efforts to provide accessible care for its vulnerable populations. Building upon a successful 2022 trial of the Minamori system in a nursing home, this resulted in increased staff efficiency and a 70% reduction in paper waste. For the first phase of the initiative, IoT devices and an app were deployed to healthcare facilities to alert caregivers and families on emergencies like falls or health declines. The second phase introduced a cloud-based app for remote health monitoring, appointment scheduling, and medication management, easing the workload of healthcare staff. Finally, telemedicine services were launched, enabling patients to consult doctors from home for greater convenience and accessibility (NEC).

Doha

Doha, Qatar is another city that is primarily focused on improving medical facility infrastructure, integrating technology in its patient care, and improving accessibility for its residents. A key example of progress in Doha is the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), the primary public healthcare provider since 1979. HMC operates specialized hospitals offering services from emergency care to advanced surgeries and has expanded accessibility through home healthcare and national ambulance services. Another notable advancement in Doha's healthcare system is the integration of telemedicine and digital health platforms. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling patients to access medical consultations remotely.

Most of the funding for this system comes from the Qatar government which subsidizes costs for residents paying out of pocket for expenses. Another important aspect is the reformation of the mandatory health insurance system formerly known as SEHA in May 2022, when Law No. 22 was passed to expand healthcare service access to non Qatari residents, employees, and visitors. With a high number of expatriates, the law mandates that employers and sponsors provide health insurance coverage for their expatriate employees and their families through registered insurance providers. The law also promotes reliance on private healthcare to ease the burden on public facilities while ensuring universal access to essential services, with the Ministry of Public Health regulating the system and enforcing compliance through penalties for non-adherence.

Civil Rights

Urban centers often serve as areas of social progress for marginalized groups and identities. However, this generalization does not account for the massive discrepancies of culture, wealth, political environment, and numerous other sociological factors that create oppressive conditions for minorities. In South Asia, the caste system is still prevalent and exacerbates a social and economic stratification that restricts employment, marriage, and the access to public services such as schools and transportation. In 64 countries around the world, gay marriage is criminalized and the social stigma surrounding individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community comes with exclusion, harassment, physical harm, and in extreme cases, death. Women continued to be

disenfranchised in this day and age, ranging from global wage disparities to restrictions in their bodily autonomy. Throughout this weekend, it is imperative to discuss how the WCF can rectify the horrific mistreatment of oppressed groups, and what resources can be provided to even the playing field. Civil rights is often overlooked when capturing a traditional and grandiose vision of wealth and prosperity, but the World Cities Forum contends that a holistic approach to success and wellbeing ensures that all individuals, regardless of their marginalized status, are eligible to the benefits of the municipality they reside in.

Gender Equity

Rapid urbanization has created a positive impact on a wide variety of opportunities and accessible services for marginalized communities especially women. At the same time, research has shown that “there is a lack of effectively enforced laws and policies that provide women with enhanced economic, social, educational, and political opportunities and reduce barriers to formal employment, citizenship rights, income earning opportunities, and access and use of productive assets and urban services” (USAID). This disparity highlights a need for a comprehensive approach, informed by an intersectional lens, to create safe and inclusive spaces within cities where women can thrive.

Tunis

Unlike many western cities where institutionalized gender equality frameworks are often more established, cities like Tunis, Tunisia are tackling deeply ingrained societal and structural barriers, serving as vital examples for its approach of gender sensitive urban planning in the Global South. The Femmedina Project, launched in 2020 by the Cities Alliance and the Municipality of Tunis focuses on enhancing women's inclusion in urban planning and revitalizing the historic Medina as a safe space for a “women’s ability to actively participate in the day-to-day urban life of the community without being hindered by restrictions on their ability to move freely through urban spaces” (Maci and Cicognola).

In the first phase, local experts and residents engaged in interviews, workshops, and surveys to gather data and identify key areas for intervention. The second phase focuses on small-scale refurbishments in districts within Tunis addressing women’s needs with improvements like training centers, public toilets, women-focused recreational spaces, and marketplaces for women



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



artisans. Lastly, the final phase will expand the project's impact across Tunisia through a city-to-city exchange, promoting peer-to-peer learning, and sharing the project's approach and outcomes with other municipalities nationwide. By giving women from all backgrounds a voice in shaping their cities, projects like Femmedina not only improve physical infrastructure but also dismantle the societal barriers that have long excluded marginalized groups.



LGBT+ Rights

Internationally, there are tremendous discrepancies for members of the LGBT+ community in relation to how they are treated, legal protections, employment opportunities, and even their right to be open about their identity without reprisal. In recent years, there has been some strides made to improve the status quo, but millions of individuals still suffer some form of discrimination and 12 countries have the death penalty for homosexuality (Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, and Yemen). Furthermore, there is an inextricable link between economic inequality and the LGBT+ community, with nearly one in four members living in urban poverty based on current data, and experts estimating that the real number is even higher.

*Disclaimer: We understand that some of the cities assigned will have national stances on the LGBT+ community that are not progressive. However, as cities are generally more progressive than nation-wide policies, and since delegates are acting as a representative and not an appointed emissary, we encourage flexibility on this matter. If your city is extremely hostile, it is acceptable to not discuss this issue and focus on the plethora of other issues outlined within or outside of our background guide. To reiterate, delegates will not be penalized if they are not focusing on certain issues, and should feel comfortable to sign on to resolutions even if they are not fully consistent with the national policy of certain countries.

São Paulo

Referencing the scholarship of James Green, a professor of Latin American History at Brown University, a prominent Brazilian LGBT+ movement was founded in the late 1970s which aligned with feminist and black organizations that collectively “fought for an end to discrimination, equality, and full rights” (Green). Since its inception, LGBT activists have challenged stereotypes about the community and have won important victories such as same-sex marriage, legal recognition of trans people and their gender identity, and constitutional protection against hate speech. In São Paulo, this city is one of the largest growing metropolitan populations in the world, with its 22 million population hosting one of the most densely populated LGBT+ communities in all of South America. São Paulo is so well known that it is recognized internationally as hosting the largest Pride Parade in the world, a celebration that seeks to celebrate LGBT+ identities and amplify ongoing issues and struggles that the community faces (Encyclopaedia).



Questions to Consider

1. What steps should cities take in order to ensure both affordability and accessibility to quality primary and higher education?
2. How can cities create policies that support workers in the informal and formal economy while paying liveable wages and preventing inflation?
3. What role should public-private partnerships play in addressing the global housing crisis, and how can they be structured to ensure accessibility for marginalized communities?
4. What measures should cities take to ensure that healthcare systems are resilient during global crises, such as pandemics, while still meeting the needs of all citizens?
5. How can cities adopt an intersectional approach to urban planning that takes into account the diverse needs of women, LGBT+ individuals, and other marginalized groups in their provision of municipal services like housing, healthcare, and public spaces?

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