

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

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UN-Habitat advances urban resilience to extreme heat through climate-smart planning, improved housing and infrastructure design, nature-based solutions, and community-led heat action plans, laying the groundwork for cities that are cooler, safer, and more inclusive.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries to promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action.

Lead Heat Entities:

Climate Change and Urban Environment (CCUE)
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KEY FACTS

Climate induced extreme heat kills 2x more people each year than hurricanes and tornadoes combined.

Climate induced extreme heat is far deadlier than other natural disasters. The impacts of the climate crisis are being unleashed in an unprecedented manner on many interconnected urban systems, including economic, social, ecological and urban infrastructure systems.

[World Cities Report 2024](#)

While 89% of countries mention national-level climate hazards in their NDCs, only 26 per cent reference these hazards at the urban level.

"Heat/cold waves" and "temperature rise" are referenced far less frequently than "flooding," which tops urban hazard mentions. This gap suggests that while national frameworks are beginning to recognize climate impacts, urban-scale risks like extreme heat still require further attention within policy frameworks.

[Urban Content of NDCs 2024](#)

The combined effects of climate change and urban expansion will intensify urban heat islands, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

In a high emissions scenario, by 2040, as much as 36 per cent of the global population in cities could experience mean annual temperatures of 29 degrees Celsius or above. Just 1% of the population in cities globally would be spared temperature increases.

[World Cities Report 2024](#)

Nature-based solutions and eco-system based adaptation bring a triple dividend of mitigating emissions, protecting ecological assets, and adapting the built environment to climate change.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) and Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), especially when in partnership with the most vulnerable communities, can reduce heat island effects, improve flood resilience, and stabilize erosion-prone land while stimulating socio-economic and food security.

[Nature-Based Solutions to Build Climate Resilience in Informal Areas](#)

Urban LEDS

Through the Urban-LEDS project, local governments develop comprehensive Urban Low Emissions Development Strategies (LEDS), create integrated climate action plans aligned with the Global Covenant of Mayors framework, and implement policies, programs and projects. This includes climate risk and vulnerability assessments that analyze heat stress and temperature extremes, allowing cities to identify high-risk areas and integrate heat mitigation strategies (such as urban greening, nature-based solutions, and passive cooling measures) into local planning. UN-Habitat and ICLEI work together on Urban-LEDS in more than 60 cities worldwide.

Core Partners: ICLEI, 60 local governments

Greener Cities Partnership

The Greener Cities Partnership is a long-standing collaboration between UNEP and UN-Habitat that unites global environmental expertise with deep urban development experience to support sustainable, climate-resilient cities. By combining technical expertise, global policy alignment, and country-level experience, the partnership supports more coherent planning, implementation, and reporting. In Tunisia and Morocco, this has resulted in the establishment of district cooling systems that are helping residents cope with extreme heat, while reducing energy demand in dense urban areas. A key priority moving forward is combining UNEPs and UN-Habitat's comparative advantages in addressing urban and extreme heat.

Core Partners: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Our City Plans

This UN-Habitat initiative guides cities to develop inclusive and integrated planning processes, based on a modular and flexible toolbox that can be adapted to various contexts.

Divided into the four phases (Assessment, Planning, Operationalization, Implementation), this comprehensive toolbox includes activities and tools for mapping of areas affected by heat, classifying heatwaves as hazards, and including heat waves as a meteorological hazard in vulnerability assessments. In addition, Our City Plans features thematic filters that help cities understand how heat is often exacerbated by poor planning decisions, such as traffic congestion, industrial emissions, and waste heat from buildings and transport systems, all of which contribute significantly to health risks.

Global Public Space Programme

UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme was launched in 2012 to support local governments to create and promote socially inclusive, integrated, connected and environmentally sustainable public spaces, especially for the most vulnerable. Since its inception, the programme has supported public space assessments and improvements across 88 cities. By positioning public space as a strategic entry point for advancing public health and climate resilience, the programme has played a vital role in mapping urban heat islands and designing inclusive, climate-adaptive public areas to help cities better prepare for and respond to rising temperatures. It has thus supported 88 cities to prepare greening strategies for more connected, inclusive public space networks that enhance sustainable urban cooling.

Core Partners: Block by Block Foundation, Avina, SIDA, Healthbridge, Project for Public Spaces, Shared City Foundation, Foundation Botnar, Catalytic Action

★ Featured initiative

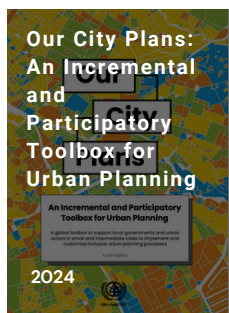
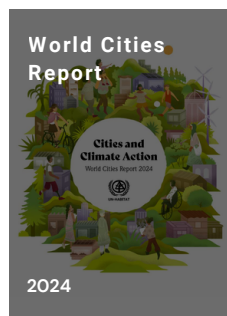
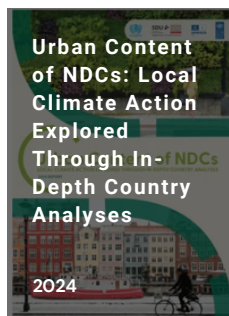
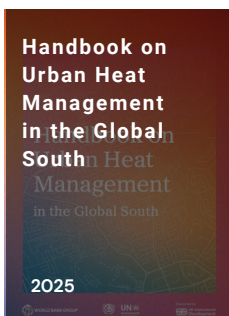
RISE UP

Recognizing the urgent need to empower vulnerable cities, UN-Habitat launched the Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor (RISE UP) Flagship Programme that focuses on cities and communities most at risk, providing the tools and resources needed to adapt to growing climate-induced stress including increasing temperatures and heatwaves.

Through its global network of regional, national, and local offices, RISE UP leverages a legacy of successful initiatives to design, finance and deliver high-impact projects including urban infrastructure for heat resilience. The programme has already mobilized over US\$150 million to implement proven, scalable solutions in cities in climate vulnerability hotspots across the world.

Core Partners: Adaptation Fund, GCF, GEF, AECID, UN 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, Sida, Adapt40

HEAT RESOURCES



Foundational documents governing institutional heat activities

- UN Habitat Strategic Plan 2026-29
- Resolution 2/5: Enhancing the interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience (HSP/HA.2/Res5)
- Resolution 2/4: Biodiverse and resilient cities – mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services into urban and territorial planning
- Resolution 2/9: Creation of a human settlements' resilience framework for early warning, foresight, risk reduction, crisis response, and post-crisis recovery and reconstruction



SUPPORTING THE SDGS, INCLUDING:



This heat action profile was developed by the [Global Heat Health Information Network](#) in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), as a contribution to the [United Nations Secretary-General's Call to Action on Extreme Heat](#) (2024). The content was validated by focal points from the profiled international organization / agency, and captures a snapshot of its heat work at the time of publication. The profile will be periodically updated.

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