

MUNICIPAL *times.*

THE POWER THAT UNITES US

THE 2024 UCLG RETREAT KICKS OFF ACTING FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY



**THE UN PACT
FOR THE FUTURE**
P. 4

**2024 MUNICIPAL
FORECAST UNVEILED:
WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR
CITIES?**
P. 5

**A NEW REPORT
ON SMART CITIES
RELEASED**
P. 6

**PROMOTING THE ROLE OF
SPORTS IN LOCAL SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
P. 7

WHAT'S ON TODAY?
P. 8

X SAYS
P. 8

With the title “The Power that Unites Us,” the Opening Plenary marked the beginning of this year’s Retreat. UCLG’s president, **Uğur İbrahim Altay**, Mayor of Konya in Türkiye, took the floor to start this intense week. He pointed out the world’s pain and the power of SDGs localisation. “In 2024, we have to put our interest towards local mechanisms. [...] We can’t meet goals if we don’t collaborate, so here is our platform.” He also explained the importance of 2024 as a super-election year where mayors and members of local and regional governments will have to maintain and foster transparency, multilateralism and innovation. “A mayor is always a mayor,“ he concluded with a nod to Ms Maimunah Mohd Sharif, enabling UCLG members to understand local contexts while strengthening global actions and claiming a seat at the international table.

In his address, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Policy, **Guy Ryder**, emphasised the critical role of local and regional governments in shaping a more inclusive multilateral system. He stressed the need for collective action to address global challenges and integrate local perspectives into decision-making processes. Ryder also highlighted the work of the UN Secretary General’s Advisory Group as critical to the Pact for the Future and reinforced the role of local and regional governments towards the Summit for the Future and beyond.

Following him was **Maimunah Mohd Sharif** herself, who until recently was UN-Habitat’s Executive Director. She was awarded the “honorary member” status at UCLG and expressed her gratitude for this recognition. “I never forget the key principle in good town planning: We must never play God and change

our tune with the time. Instead, we must be broad-minded, consider the local context, think locally, and act globally. Before, UCLG thought globally and acted locally, but now it is the reverse.” Considering that 64 per cent of the targets of the SDGs will be met in cities and 70 per cent of the global population will live in cities in 2050, she emphasised the importance of working together and expressed her readiness to support UCLG.

A view of the United States came from **Nina Hachigian**, US Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy to the UN, who shared that more and more cities in the US have a more profound international outlook, which has not always been the case historically. She presented the Cities Summit of the Americas, which took place in April 2023, gathering local and regional governments around the world, and stressed the importance of mayors as stewards of service but also of values.

Marlene Holzner, head of Unit D2 for local authorities and civil society for the European Commission, brought a European perspective in the face of multiple crises, weakening multilateralism, and tight financial budgets. With the [Global Gateway Strategy](#), the EU aims to support local people and communities better worldwide. By consulting and implementing projects in and with communities locally in Brussels and internationally, the EU shows how we must work together, harnessing “The Power of We” to tackle our future challenges. “When we discuss big corridors linking different cities and countries, it is not only the road we are interested in, but also the economic development in the region, working with local authorities and local communities.”

A view of Brazil, the host of this year’s G20 and the accompanying Urban20 showed that the country and its Ministry of Cities are back. **Antonio da Costa Silva**, the Chief International advisor of the Ministry of Cities in Brazil, underscored that “there is no urban justice without local justice; there is no sustainable development without urban sustainability; there is no resilience without urban resilience; there are no human rights without the right to the city.” He made clear that the Brazilian government and the Ministry of Cities are key partners for UCLG, particularly in view of the fact that 85 per cent of the population in the country lives in cities: “We strongly believe that we need to make local voices heard. We are listening.”

With the [Summit of the Future](#) as one of the year’s critical milestones for the constituency of local and regional governments, **Michèle Griffin** from the organising committee and part of the Our Common Agenda Policy Group shared some ideas for enshrining a much more inclusive network of multilateralism. “Global governance is more important than ever, frankly existentially important to our survival and the survival of our planet. It will be a springboard to a different kind of future.”



THE DEBATE



Uğur İbrahim Altay, UCLG President

“We are here as local leaders from different parts of the world. We are here to protect the rights of cities and people.”



Bheke Stofile, UCLG Co-president

“We must advocate for peace, stability, and respect for humanity worldwide, prioritising cooperation over political interests and territorial control.”



Mauricio Zunino, acting Mayor of Montevideo

“As local governments, we are the frontline representatives of our communities, tasked with maintaining close ties to the people we serve. Our duty extends beyond borders or boundaries; it is a commitment to cooperation and inclusivity, driving towards development models centred on human well-being.”



Eckart Würzner, Mayor of Heidelberg

“Mayors, as citizens’ representatives, hold a unique position of responsibility in advocating for their cities. Cities must take charge of essential services like water resources and waste management to ensure the safety and well-being of residents.”



Sharon Dijksma, Mayor of Utrecht

“We could have this better discussion... If we could look into the other and see what is the thing that combines us, that unites us, instead of looking for words that divide us.”



Liu Xinshe, Deputy Secretary General, Xi'an Municipal Foreign Affairs Office

“We propose to set up a digital drive for high-quality urban development. We consider using digitalisation as a breakthrough to promote high-quality economic development.”



Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, Governor of Kisumu

“We should create space for discussing what we must do about areas where cities and urban areas fail because of conflict. Because it is our responsibility, those of us who love peace, to organise more effectively than those who love war.”



Berry Vrbanovic, Mayor of Kitchener and UCLG Co-President

“The reality is that we need to speak with one voice, be that united voice to help ensure we can deal with these issues.”



Paola Pabón, President of CONGOPE, Vice-President of UCLG for the Forum of Regions

“The common point is to care for life, to confront the reality in an armed conflict, in an internal conflict, because we have to face what the citizen experiences daily from the provision of services.”



THE UN PACT FOR THE FUTURE



“What will the headlines say the day after the Summit of the Future?” This important event will take place this year on the 22 and 23 September, aiming to finalise the world’s Pact for the Future, with United Nations member states, local and regional governments and non-state actors expected to contribute throughout the year.

During the opening plenary of the UCLG Retreat 2024, **Michèle Griffin**, director of the Common Agenda/Summit of the Future Team in the office of Secretary-General António Guterres, expressed her hopes for the headlines and the information on the media on 24 September 2024: “We will at least have taken meaningful steps towards a world with a much more effective collective security system that can prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in traditional domains but also in many of the new domains where we see conflict beginning to take hold.

She argued that the outcome of the Pact “will achieve an equitable, effective financial

system that reflects today’s needs and economic realities, and it will also change financing for development and climate action in particular. It will put in place systems to harness opportunities and manage the risks of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. It will kick start much stronger foresight and make concrete the commitments that we have made hundreds of times, including in the UN Charter, to future generations and ensure that our big decisions are never made without considering their future impact. Every decision we make will allow us to avoid the foreseeable harm we are currently doing to future generations. Mechanisms for expanded youth participation and opportunity at all local, national and global levels will be set up.”

The promise is paramount, and the world watches as local and regional representatives and delegations prepare to transform fundamental global governance mechanisms. Changes to the Security Council, the General Assembly and international financial institutions are

long overdue. The latter holds great potential for aligning better with today’s world. And this is an opportunity for multilateral and local governance to play a much broader – and well-funded – role in future developments.

The action-oriented Pact for the Future will demonstrate global solidarity for current and future generations. It brings to mind the inspiring and striking climate fiction novel “The Ministry for the Future” by Kim Stanley Robinson, which is set in the near future and explores a new subsidiary body that acts as an advocate for the world’s future generations. It assumes that their rights are as valid as the rights of the present generation, making the effects of climate change the most critical challenge to tackle together. While it is unlikely that we will wake up to headlines of a new Ministry being developed, we should aim to start on 24th September 2024, hoping that local and multilateral actions will have the opportunity to take centre stage they deserve and that the world – and future generations – need.

2024 MUNICIPAL FORECAST UNVEILED: WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR CITIES?



The highly anticipated *Municipal Forecast 2024* has been released, building on the success of last year's inaugural edition launched by the Urban Journalism Institute with support from UCLG. The *Municipal Forecast* aims to gather and highlight the urban trends of the upcoming year. Focusing on cities, the publication underscores the importance of the decisions and processes happening at the local level in shaping global dynamics.

In this year's edition, the *Municipal Forecast* explores several key themes ranging from the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on our everyday lives to the imperative of local multilateralism, the significance of the super-election year, the new challenges posed by climate change, and the ongoing implementation of the SDGs.

The discourse surrounding AI, particularly ChatGPT, remains at the forefront. While the world is learning how to integrate AI and make the most use of it, governments are stepping up and introducing policies to set regulations for AI technology to ensure against its misuse and discrimination.

Implementing the SDGs is critical to many global challenges, from combating inequality and poverty to healthcare, education, and sustainable urbanisation. These challenges are often experienced and addressed at the local level. Therefore, local governments play a key role in tackling these challenges effectively. A *Decalogue* of high-impact coalitions to localise the 2030 Agenda can be found on the last pages of the *Forecast*.

Moreover, 2024 marks a super-election year, with over 70 countries preparing for national or legislative elections alongside numerous local elections. There is also hope that this year, the number of women in local and global leadership will increase, bringing the share closer to the 50 per cent mark. In 2023, this milestone was only reached by three countries - Antigua and Barbuda, Iceland, and Bolivia. While there is some progress, UN Women's projection is sobering: at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be realised for another 130 years.

Another topic that cannot be overlooked is climate change. Both last year's and this

year's *Municipal Forecast* spotlight the existential threat posed by climate change cities worldwide. As the discussion of the main outcomes of COP28 in Dubai and how they will shape the future of our cities and the world, the urgency of addressing climate-related challenges cannot be overstated. In 2024, the impact of climate change will be exacerbated by the effects of the El Niño phenomenon. This means that heatwaves and record-breaking summer temperatures will again hit the world, particularly affecting cities and their most vulnerable citizens.

Culture and art are also part of the Forecast, including how artists are trying to challenge gender prejudices in Japan's written language or illustrating the concept of loss and damage through photography, music or architecture.

🌐 You can read the online version of the *Municipal Forecast 2024* at: <https://urbanjournalism.institute/forecast/>



A NEW REPORT ON SMART CITIES RELEASED

The latest edition of the “Smart Cities Study 2023” was published in January 2024, highlighting cities’ contribution to achieving the SDGs through innovation. Developed by the UCLG Community of Practice on Digital Cities, chaired by the city of Bilbao, the report sheds light on the current landscape and significant trends across the six axes of smart cities: Smart Economy, New Mobility, Environment, Digital Citizenship, Quality of Life, and Smart Governance.

The study delves into cities as innovation-driven ecosystems, fostering collaboration and creativity where pilot projects emerge in response to social and economic challenges. These projects drive research, development, and innovation (R&D&I) from a public-private perspective, contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

Apart from outlining current trends in smart city domains, the study showcases a selection of best practices contributed by 20 cities from 16 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America that can be replicated in other cities worldwide. It also identifies key barriers and facilitators impacting smart city development.

The study underscores the need for cities to anticipate and address citizens’ evolving needs through intelligent tools and technologies, enabling real-time data analysis and informed decision-making. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of a participatory approach involving multiple public-private stakeholders to foster synergy and optimise investments, thereby enhancing competitiveness locally, nationally, and internationally. Local and regional governments emerge as pivotal facilitators in driving and orchestrating innovation ecosystems.

Aligned with the growth trajectories of Smart Cities, participating cities have predominantly focused on initiatives in the Smart Economy (27%) and Environment (20%). A significant portion of participating cities (46%) underscored projects aligned with SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, aimed at fostering inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. Close behind is SDG 9: Industry, Infrastructure, and Innovation (45%), emphasising resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialisation, and innovation promotion.

The study aims to serve as a reference guide for cities interested in advancing towards Smart Cities and contributing to the SDGs.

To date, four editions of the international “Smart Cities Study” have been published:

2012: The first edition offers a comprehensive review of Smart cities, converging on six critical areas of action that affect city development: Economy, Citizenship, Governance, Mobility, Environment, and Quality of Life.

2017: The second edition focuses on the “Economy” axis. It analyses key factors linked to Smart Cities: innovation, entrepreneurship, knowledge and talent, and digital society and economy.

2019: The third edition focuses on the “Governance” axis. In this edition, the main aspects of smart governance and its key action areas are analysed, including open government and advanced strategic management in cities, as factors in the transformation of Smart Cities.

2021: The fourth edition analyses the “Resilience” of cities developed through adopting “Smart” measures due to the pandemic.

NEW WEBSITE FOR THE UCLG COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON DIGITAL CITIES



In parallel with the fifth edition of the “Smart Cities Study 2023” publication, the UCLG Community of Practice on Digital Cities launched its new website. Best practices and initiatives led by cities within the community are now accessible, as well as the early editions of the “Smart Cities Study.”

Visit: <https://uclg-digitalcities.org/>

PROMOTING THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN LOCAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



UCLG and ACES Europe announced a strategic partnership to leverage sports for social progress on the first day of the 2024 UCLG Retreat. This collaboration signifies a concerted effort to develop and foster a culture of sports and physical activity at the local level, recognising sports as a fundamental element of sustainable development.

ACES Europe, a non-profit organisation recognised for its commitment to promoting sports as a catalyst for social cohesion and individual well-being, is renowned for awarding distinctions such as the World Capital of Sport, European Capital of Sport, and American Capital of Sport.

Both entities acknowledge the multifaceted benefits of sports, which extend beyond physical fitness to encompass mental health, social integration, and community empowerment. Recognising the intrinsic link between sports and various human rights, including health, education, and gender equality, they aim to harness the universal appeal of sports to foster peace, tolerance, and understanding across borders.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by both organisations outlines UCLG's commitment to promoting sports among its members

and integrating them into local policies to drive social and economic change. Additionally, UCLG will support awards granted by ACES Europe, acknowledging cities and regions that excel in leveraging sports for advancement.

ACES Europe will establish a panel of experts to advise UCLG's working groups and committees on sports policy, further enhancing the integration of sports into local governance strategies. They also agreed to advance the Local Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) with UCLG, which will actively promote sports and physical activity among its members, advocating for their inclusion in local policies to drive social and economic development.

This partnership represents a significant step in harnessing the potential of sports for social development, especially with the worldwide attention the Olympic Games in Paris will have during July and August 2024. As cities around the globe embrace this initiative, the stage is set for empowered, inclusive communities driven by the transformative power of sports.

What's on Today?

20 FEBRUARY 2024

Global Taskforce Day

The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, which gathers the major networks of local and regional governments from all over the world, holds its Annual Meeting in the framework of the Retreat in Barcelona, discussing the strategy of the Network towards the SDG Summit and beyond.

At 11 a.m., the Global Taskforce working session begins at the Hotel Catalonia Barcelona with a “Fostering Ecological Transformation” segment. This session is dedicated to the constituency’s priorities related to green transformation and within the framework of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Group (LGMA), as well as specific initiatives and milestones to consider, with a particular focus on SDG 13.

In the same room, from 2 to 3 p.m., the most important milestones for 2024 related to equality and human rights are discussed, including a follow-up on Our Common Agenda’s targets related to poverty, hunger and human mobility (SDGs 1 and 2).

The 3 to 5 p.m. session focuses on the renewal of multilateralism. It includes a meeting on the United Nations Secretary General’s Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments and its inputs to the UN’s Pact for the Future.

The segment on the Peace Agenda and the contributions from the constituency to the UN Secretary General’s New Agenda for Peace takes place from 5 to 6 p.m., with SDG16 at the centre, followed by the Stocktaking Plenary with the results obtained throughout the various sessions. The day ends with a Reception at 7:15 p.m. at the Barcelona City Hall.

X SAYS

THE @UCLG_ORG RETREAT BEGINS, AND WE MEET AGAIN!

Barcelona once more welcomes representatives from the five continents who, throughout the week, will be able to share strategies and reflect on the different perspectives and paths to take. Because that is the aim of the UCLG Retreat: “to rethink our goals as local and regional governments”.

A new year begins, but the mission remains the same: acting for the planet’s and people’s future. For this, we put the focus on the role that falls on local governments, responsible for working in favour of peace-building 🕊️, population trends 🧑🏠 and care 💚.

The unification of over 200 local governments worldwide under the hashtag #UCLGMeets amplifies their collective voice, striving to ensure that #ThePowerOfWe resonates globally. Throughout this dynamic week, characterised by discussions, collaborative initiatives, memorandums, and active participation, the contours of the Pact for the Future of Humanity take shape.

2024 is coming in strong, and, as the new issue of #MunicipalForecast illustrates, many challenges are ahead. But UCLG members themselves give us the solution to how to meet them: #action, #learning, #sharing, #partnership or #humanity are terms that resonate in their voices as they describe the essence of the UCLG Retreat. Herein lie the inherent responsibilities of local and regional governments. Knowing this, the next step is clear: work hand in hand.

Because in this scenario, the power that unites us finds its ultimate expression in collaboration. By pooling efforts and resources, we unlock the key to addressing the multifaceted challenges of the present and the future. The resounding message is clear – the power of collaboration is not just a tool but the driving force propelling us towards a sustainable, peaceful, and equitable world. 🌍🌻

UCLG WORLD COUNCIL IN THE HAGUE

The UCLG World Council 2024 is set to convene in The Hague, Netherlands, from 8 to 10 October 2024, as presented by Mayor Jan Van Zanen, member of the UCLG Executive Presidency. The announcement, made during the Retreat’s first day, featured a promotional video emphasising the significance of peace for the Dutch city,

which is celebrating the 125th anniversary since the first Hague Peace Conference took place. Mayor Van Zanen highlighted the collective responsibility of local and regional governments in fostering global harmony: “The world needs us to work together, offering and highlighting examples of peace.”