

2nd World Forum on Urban Forests - 2023

The Washington D.C. Declaration¹

18 October 2023, Washington DC, USA

We, participants of the second World Forum on Urban Forests (WFUF) gathered in Washington D.C., USA, on 16-18 October 2023, to assert once more the value of urban forests as a strategic asset to address urbanization and global climate challenges, and make communities and their environment healthier, more inclusive, and more resilient.

Bearing in mind the goals of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which stresses the importance of creating inclusive and accessible cities and Target 12 of the Global Biodiversity Framework which calls for significantly increasing the access to the benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas.

Convinced that, if professionally planned and managed, urban nature can be a powerful tool to foster social cohesion, enhance public health and decrease the inequalities between marginalized and privileged individuals within cities, as well as promoting a sense of identity, heritage and belonging.

Aware that, despite the increasing recognition of the variety of services that urban forests and interconnected systems can provide to their beneficiaries, greater effort is needed to ensure enhanced and more equitable access to the benefits of trees and greenspaces and to increase environmental justice among urban and community dwellers worldwide.

Noting that, access to the benefits of green infrastructure varies among urban residents globally, as generally more privileged individuals tend to live in greener neighborhoods and enjoy greater benefits than those who are marginalized.

Want to send a message to those responsible for decisions on urban planning and development, reaffirming that:

- the diverse goods and services provided by urban forests should be available and accessible to all residents, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity and socio economic conditions;
- poor management of urban forests and greenspaces can result in the adoption of market-driven approaches that lead to green gentrification, reducing access, displacing marginalized residents who live near existing green infrastructure, and increasing social inequalities;
- urban forests should not only be accessible, but also be inclusive, equitably distributed, and multifunctional, fostering equal and equitable access to their benefits and accommodating for physical, social, or cultural differences between potential users.

¹ The views expressed in this declaration do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Co-organizers of the 2nd World Forum on Urban Forests

In particular, We recommend that planners and managers:

- **Conduct interdisciplinary assessments and long-term strategies** in urban areas to understand the socio-economic fabric of the individual neighborhoods, assess the distribution of green infrastructure's benefits among different socio-economic groups, and identify existing inequities.
- **Engage local communities** in the planning, design, management and care of public greenspaces to ensure that their needs are duly considered and they are empowered to transform urban greenspaces into meaningful greenplaces, through effective engagement and inclusive decision making processes.
- **Involve all interested parties** to better understand local challenges and opportunities, harmonize their interests, and ensure both the feasibility and the long-term sustainability of urban greening projects.
- **Develop and implement inclusive urban greening solutions** that not only avoid perpetuating social inequities but also contribute towards their resolution, by reducing the risk of green gentrification, mitigating climate-related inequalities and prioritizing projects that fill the green gap and create equal opportunities to access goods and services of urban forests.
- **Support, finance, and conduct studies** to identify knowledge gaps, promote best practices, strengthen tools for measuring urban forest equity, promote and support scientific collaborations across regions, validate models of co-creation and methods that involve residents, managers and underserved populations, including participatory action research and citizen science.

Concluding We:

Are convinced that more work is urgently needed to face the challenge of ensuring equitable access to green benefits among urban residents worldwide, in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Firmly believe that by working in partnership, we can achieve these collective goals and chart a new course toward conserving, restoring, managing, and implementing urban green infrastructure for the benefit of All.

We invite you all to join us to work towards a world where cities, urban forests and people can grow and thrive together!

