



ANIMAL WELFARE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 11

Inputs for the High-Level Political Forum 2026

(This position paper was prepared by WFA on behalf of its 73 member organisations, with special contributions from International Companion Animal Coalition, The Donkey Sanctuary, Working Animals International, and The Brooke,)

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Context: SDG 11 will be central in 2026 multilateral discussions on sustainable cities, localization, resilience, and inclusive public space.

Purpose: This position paper highlights why animal welfare, humane dog and cat population management, working animal protection, and One Health are relevant to SDG 11 implementation.

Summary: The treatment of free-roaming dogs and cats, the welfare of working animals, and the inclusion of animals in urban health and disaster planning all shape whether cities are safe, inclusive, healthy, and resilient.

Thesis: How cities treat animals contributes to how residents experience public space, public health, and resilience. Humane systems for managing free-roaming dogs and cats, protecting working animals, and integrating One Health are practical municipal infrastructure for delivering SDG 11.

Recommendations

- HLPF 2026 should explicitly recognise that the humane treatment of animals in cities contributes to safe, inclusive, accessible, and resilient urban environments under SDG 11.
- Animal welfare and One Health should be integrated into SDG 11 discussions on public space, public health, transport, disaster resilience, and municipal services.
- Encourage cities to adopt humane dog and cat population management systems, including vaccination and sterilization, alongside responsible ownership education, accessible veterinary care, regulation and enforcement.
- Recognise working equids and other working animals in urban and peri-urban systems as contributors to sustainable transport, municipal waste management, livelihoods, water allocation, and disaster response.
- Working animals represent an essential infrastructure for vulnerable and marginalized communities, and we therefore encourage their appropriate consideration in planning for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

Priorities

- Treat visible animal suffering and violence in public space as relevant to Target 11.7 on safe, inclusive, and accessible public space.
- Advance humane dog and cat population management as a practical municipal governance issue supported by public preference and public funding.
- Embed One Health across urban policy by linking human, animal, and environmental health in city planning and service delivery.
- Recognise and protect working animals in transport, waste systems, and disaster risk reduction under Targets 11.2, 11.5, and 11.6.
- In accordance with Target 11.2, regulations governing the use of animal-drawn vehicles and working animals must be put in place to safeguard their welfare and that of road users.

Key messages

Animal welfare is part of what makes public space safe and inclusive

Violence, culling, and visible untreated suffering undermine how residents experience shared urban space. SDG 11.7 should be read to include the quality and humanity of public environments, not only physical access.

Children's exposure to violence against animals is a city inclusion issue

General Comment No. 26 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children must be protected from exposure to violence, including violence against animals. This provides a child-rights basis for addressing public animal violence within urban policy.

Humane dog and cat population management has a clear public mandate

ICAM polling in Mexico, Türkiye, and the Philippines found 73% of urban residents prefer sterilise, vaccinate and return. Support for capture and kill was just 2%. More than 80% supported tax funding for humane dog and cat population management, which respondents consistently ranked among their top city priorities.

One Health belongs in the sustainable cities agenda

The 2025 HLPF ministerial declaration referenced cooperation across human, animal, plant, and environmental health sectors. While important in itself, embedding animal health and welfare in urban policymaking is also a public health issue. The 2025 UN Forum of Mayors outcome document also recognized animal health in cities as interlinked with human and environmental health. We call for increased investment in animal health in order to prevent the transmission of zoonotic diseases and reduce the risk of future pandemics.

Working animals should be recognised in city systems

Working animals support transport, waste management, access to water, access to essential services, and livelihoods where infrastructure gaps persist. They strengthen disaster resilience both in the delivery of aid and the rebuilding of livelihoods, and their safety, health and welfare should therefore be fully reflected in disaster risk reduction planning.

SUPPORTING ANALYSIS & RATIONALE

Animal welfare is directly relevant to whether cities are safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. The treatment of free-roaming dogs and cats, the welfare of working animals, and the inclusion of animals in urban health, public space, and disaster planning all affect daily life in cities.

Safe, inclusive public space and Target 11.7

Violence towards free-roaming dogs and cats in public spaces, from state-sanctioned culling to visible untreated suffering, can undermine residents' experience of safe, inclusive and accessible public space. Cities that tolerate visible animal suffering or violent public animal control practices risk weakening public trust, social inclusion and the humane quality of shared urban environments.

ICAM polling across Mexico, Türkiye, and the Philippines found that around 9 in 10 urban residents are distressed by visibly suffering free-roaming dogs and cats in their cities. Public space

inclusion under Target 11.7 must account for what residents see, not only how they move through it.

Children's exposure to violence and urban inclusion

General Comment No. 26 from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children must be protected from exposure to violence, including violence against animals. This strengthens the case for addressing visible animal violence in public space as relevant to SDG 11.7.

The Committee has also applied this reasoning in country guidance, including concluding observations on Azerbaijan urging the elimination of the public shooting of dogs. Visible animal violence is not only an animal welfare issue but also a child-rights and urban inclusion issue.

One Health and urban public health

Cities are at the forefront of One Health implementation. Urban animal health and human well-being are interdependent, shaped by shared environments and the conditions in which people and animals live. The 2025 HLPF ministerial declaration referenced cooperation across human, animal, plant, and environmental health sectors, providing a basis for stronger integration in 2026.

Public health systems need processes to build awareness of zoonotic risks and to embed early identification and tracking of potential zoonoses, particularly in relation to animals in urban and peri-urban environments.

Rabies illustrates why this matters. It is a WHO-prioritised neglected tropical disease, targeted for elimination as a public health problem by 2030, and the only neglected tropical disease where the primary intervention is in animals rather than humans. Mass dog vaccination, delivered alongside humane dog population management, is the route to ending human deaths.

The outcome document of the UN Forum of Mayors in October 2025 saw unanimous support from city leaders for language noting the importance of animal health in cities as interlinked with

human and environmental health. This confirms that city leaders already view the issue as relevant to sustainable urban governance.

Humane dog and cat population management as city governance

Humane dog and cat population management should be treated as a standing municipal service, linked to public health. National policy frameworks can support this by recognising dog and cat population management as a continuing function of local government, with clear lines of responsibility for delivery across sterilisation, vaccination, return, veterinary services, and community engagement.

The same ICAM polling found that 73% of urban residents prefer sterilise, vaccinate and return, while just 2% preferred capture and kill. At least 86% of urban residents in every country said culling is unacceptable. Respondents also consistently ranked humane dog and cat population management among their top city priorities, and more than 80% supported tax funding for it.

Working animals in transport and waste management under Targets 11.2 and 11.6

Working animals continue to fill infrastructure gaps where formal transport is lacking or municipal waste or water systems are weak. They connect rural and urban areas, transport goods and people, enable access to essential services, and support waste collection, reuse, and recycling in places where vehicle access may be limited.

Their contribution should be matched with protections for welfare, including road safety, access to shelter from extreme weather, veterinary care, rest, feed, and water access. Sustainable urban policy should recognize these realities rather than overlooking working animals within city systems.

Working animals and disaster resilience under Target 11.5

Working animals are resilience assets for communities before, during, and after disasters. They help evacuate people, bring supplies into affected areas, and support recovery by moving debris, materials, and goods needed to rebuild infrastructure and livelihoods.

Their role is already recognized in the Sendai Framework and in UN language on disaster risk reduction. It is essential therefore that working animals and their contribution to disaster resilience are routinely reflected in national and local disaster risk reduction protocols, preparedness plans, and recovery policies.

Taken together, these dynamics show that animal welfare is not external to SDG 11 implementation. It is part of how cities manage coexistence, safety, health, resilience, and dignity in shared urban spaces.

TRANSITION TOWARD HUMANE AND RESILIENT URBAN SYSTEMS

Cities can strengthen public trust and resilience by adopting integrated approaches to animal management that support coexistence.

Priority actions include:

- Embedding humane dog and cat population management into municipal planning, budgeting, and service delivery.
- Integrating animal health into urban public health strategies and considering animal health and welfare through the lens of One Health.
- Recognizing working equids and other working animals in transport, waste management, and livelihood systems.
- Including animals and working animals in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery planning.
- Strengthening city-level partnerships across veterinary, public health, environmental, and municipal service actors.

CONCLUSION

Achieving SDG 11 requires a broader understanding of what makes cities safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. Animal welfare is part of that equation.

Humane management of free-roaming dogs and cats strengthens public space, social inclusion, and trust. Protecting children from exposure to violence against animals reinforces the rights-based case under Target 11.7. One Health provides a credible framework for integrating animal health into city policy, and working animals should be explicitly recognized in transport, waste, and disaster resilience discussions under Targets 11.2, 11.5, and 11.6 as essential to the functioning of sustainable communities and cities.

SDG 11 implementation should recognise humane animal welfare systems, including humane dog and cat population management, working animal welfare and One Health approaches, as practical contributors to safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities. Far from expanding the agenda artificially, this framing makes the sustainable cities agenda more grounded in how cities function, how municipal systems operate, and what residents experience in shared urban spaces every day.

ABOUT WORLD FEDERATION FOR ANIMALS



We are a federation of more than 70 NGOs working towards the recognition of animal welfare as an essential component of the sustainable development agenda. Our efforts focus on integrating animal welfare into international health, food, and environmental regimes, as well as trade and development finance rules.

We are accredited observers to the FAO Committee on Agriculture, the UN Environment Programme and to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and we have Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council. We are also members of GASL's Action Network on Animal Welfare and of the CFS' Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism.

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