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# UN-HABITAT

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ILMUNC XLII



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# ILMUNC XLII

## Dear Delegates,

My name is Tasneem Reza, and it is an honor to serve as your Chair for this committee at ILMUNC XLII. This will be my fourth and final year with the conference — pretty nostalgic!

Since freshman year, I have pursued opportunities bridging international policy and business. I interned in Thailand on Europe–Southeast Asia tax policy, spent a semester in Washington, D.C. working for a pharmaceutical lobbying firm, and am currently conducting a year-long research project on U.S.–China competitive dynamics, including a research trip to China this December. After graduation, I will move to San Francisco to work in equity research, and I'm super excited to start this next chapter post-grad.

On campus, I've been involved with Penn Republicans, Wharton Management, and Penn Abroad, each of which has deepened my appreciation for the interplay between international markets, regulation, and social outcomes. Therefore, in this committee, I look forward to delegates taking a holistic approach to drafting resolutions — one that carefully considers your country's strategic partnerships, stance in international spaces, and the broader social and economic impacts of your proposals. And, of course, I always welcome humorous and creative debates — I personally love puns!

In UN-Habitat, you will have the opportunity to engage with pressing global challenges—such as rapid urbanization, sustainable infrastructure, and inclusive social policy—while practicing the art of policymaking on an international stage. I hope you will embrace the chance to collaborate, debate, and innovate. I cannot wait to meet each of you and to see the unique perspectives you bring to committee. Together, let's make this a meaningful and memorable ILMUNC experience. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about MUN, careers, or college—I'm happy to be a resource!

Warmly,

Tasneem Reza, [rtasneem@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:rtasneem@sas.upenn.edu)



## Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 42nd Ivy League Model United Nations Conference! My name is Julie Sidana, and I am honored to serve as an Under Secretary General of Specialized Committees and an Under Secretary General of ECOSOC. It is such a pleasure to have you all here for the forty-second iteration of this conference. On behalf of the entire secretariat, we eagerly look forward to the commencement of this exceptional conference.

A little bit about myself – I am a sophomore originally from Palo Alto, California. I study Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics at Penn. Outside of ILMUNC, I work at a nonprofit student research group building a rotating detonation rocket engine. I'm also an active member of McAdams House. In my free time, I love checking out new restaurants and coffee shops in Philly, reading, and listening to country music. While I didn't participate in MUN during high school, ILMUNC has allowed me to join such a vibrant and meaningful community that I am honored to be a part of. I am looking forward to witnessing the meaningful discussions and creative resolutions that will take place this weekend.

As we embark on this week's journey together, I want to encourage you to approach each topic with an open mind and a willingness to think critically. Whether you're a seasoned MUN (or ILMUNC!) veteran or a first-time delegate – we care about your unique perspective. Don't be afraid to speak up, even if it means stepping outside your comfort zone or cordially disagreeing with your peers. The challenges we face today require fresh ideas and innovative solutions, and I believe that you have the potential to contribute to that. I hope you will find this experience both enjoyable and enriching, as you not only hone your public speaking skills but also forge new, meaningful connections with your fellow delegates.

As a delegate, you play a crucial role in making ILMUNC a successful Model United Nations Conference. We are looking forward to celebrating your accomplishments throughout the week and hope that you have a memorable experience here. Welcome to ILMUNC!

Warm regards,  
Julie Sidana  
Under-Secretary-General

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## TOPIC A: URBAN SURVEILLANCE AND SMART CITIES: BALANCING AI-POWERED SAFETY WITH PRIVACY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

### Background/History

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the UN's focal point for making cities productive and humane. It is responsible for places where people can move, gather, and work without sacrificing dignity or safety. Its goal, rooted in the New Urban Agenda and aligned with SDG 11, is to help local governments build inclusive, safe, and sustainable urban environments. That mission now runs straight through the digital layer of the city. As mayors roll out sensors, networks of cameras, data platforms, and AI analytics, the rules that govern those systems determine who is protected, who is watched, and who gets a say. UN-Habitat's People-Centered Smart Cities workstream explicitly guides cities to pair innovation with rights, transparency, and participation.

At its core, the surveillance vs. smart-city debate is a balancing act. On one side are clear gains: faster emergency response, smoother traffic flow, timely disaster alerts, and more precisely targeted public services. Yet these advances come with civil-liberties concerns — privacy, due process, freedom of expression and assembly, and safeguards against discrimination. What began as

simple closed-circuit cameras has evolved into cloud-connected platforms powered by automated license-plate readers, video analytics that flag “anomalies,” and facial-recognition systems embedded in everyday life. In response, governments have begun to draw firmer lines. Human-rights bodies warn about the suppressing effects of broad, untargeted monitoring and urge impact assessments, strict purpose limits, and deletion rules. In parallel, regulators now offer risk-based frameworks for AI, giving cities practical tools to judge necessity, proportionality, and fairness before deployment.

Across regions, policy is converging on a few headline principles. The EU's Artificial Intelligence Act bans certain practices (e.g., biometric categorization by sensitive traits and indiscriminate scraping of facial images) and sharply restricts others, especially in public spaces, while phasing in obligations through 2026. Outside Europe, voluntary but influential guidance like NIST's AI Risk Management Framework and technical standards such as ISO/IEC 23894 give cities and vendors shared language to evaluate and mitigate risk. Together, these instruments are shifting smart-city projects from “buy first, ask later” to “pilot, prove, and audit.”

### Key Debates/Controversies

**Effectiveness vs. rights:** Do AI tools reduce harm better than non-surveillance options (lighting, street design,

youth programs), and what level of intrusion is truly necessary?

**Bias and discrimination:** Error rates in facial recognition and predictive models can differ across race, age, and gender.

**Deterrence effects & legitimacy:** Pervasive monitoring can deter protest and everyday civic life, and secret capabilities or vague purposes erode trust among civilians.

**Data governance & cybersecurity:** Who owns and accesses data, how long it's kept, and how it's secured against breaches are now central policy questions for municipalities?

**Legal baselines by region:** The EU's AI Act prohibits certain biometric practices and sets strict conditions for others while other jurisdictions rely more on voluntary frameworks and sectoral law.

## Key Stakeholders (with suggested bloc positions)

### Stakeholder: UN-Habitat and other UN Bodies

*Interests:* Ensuring smart city projects align with human rights, sustainable development (SDG 11), inclusion, transparency; drafting guidelines like the People-Centered Smart Cities framework.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Likely to push for strong safeguards—impact assessments, participation, privacy protections, governance, non-discrimination. They may

press member states to adopt binding or non-binding frameworks.

### Stakeholder: National & Local Governments / City Mayors

*Interests:* Desire to improve urban safety, infrastructure, mobility, services; to harness technology for efficiency, public safety, disaster response, etc.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Concerned about cost, technical feasibility, public pushback; risk of overreach; balancing security vs. civil liberties. Some governments may favor more permissive regulation to enable deployment.

### Stakeholder: Private Sector / Tech Vendors

*Interests:* They develop and sell sensors, cameras, AI tools, platforms; incentives to expand the market, minimize regulatory burdens; innovate.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Risks include regulation increasing costs, liability for harm or misuse; pressure for transparency. They may push for self-regulation or weaker oversight.

### Stakeholder: Civil Society / NGOs / Digital Rights

#### Advocates

*Interests:* Advocating for privacy, fairness, non-discrimination, transparency, public participation; monitoring potential abuses; protecting marginalized groups.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Likely to push for bans on particularly invasive uses (facial recognition in public,

biometrics without consent); insist on strong legal protections, redress, oversight.

**Stakeholder: Academia / Experts / Standards Bodies**

*Interests:* Researching effectiveness, bias, risk; developing technical standards, frameworks (e.g. NIST, ISO); advising on best practices.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Concerned about validity of tests, bias, algorithmic fairness; pushing for rigorous evaluation and open methodologies.

**Stakeholder: Affected Communities / Marginalized Groups (e.g. racial minorities, migrants, homeless, youth, women, older people)**

*Interests:* They often bear disproportionate risk of bias, over-surveillance, misuse; want inclusion, voice, redress.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Fear of discrimination, profiling, deterring effects; may demand strict limitations, transparency, accountability; likely skeptical of opaque systems.

**Stakeholder Law Enforcement / Public Safety Agencies**

*Interests:* Motivated by tools that can aid crime prevention, faster response, public safety.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* Might favour broad deployment; may resist constraints they see as hampering effectiveness; concerned about oversight, evidentiary standards and legal liabilities.

**Stakeholder: Private Citizens / The Public at large**

*Interests:* Interested in safety, utility of technology, but also in privacy, dignity, civil liberties.

*Likely Concerns/Positions:* May support some surveillance if properly constrained; risk of distrust if transparency is poor; public consent and legitimacy matter.

## Country / Bloc Positions

### European Union (EU) Member States

- *Position:* Strongest supporters of strict regulation. The EU AI Act (2024) bans some biometric uses (e.g. emotion recognition in workplaces, indiscriminate scraping of facial images) and sets tough conditions for high-risk uses like facial recognition in public spaces.
- *Likely in Debate:* Push for necessity/proportionality tests, mandatory impact assessments, transparency, and human-rights safeguards. May encourage other blocs to adopt EU-style frameworks.

### United States

- *Position:* Favors voluntary frameworks and innovation-first policies, like the NIST AI Risk Management Framework. AI rules remain fragmented (state/local vs. federal). Strong emphasis on civil liberties in public debate, but also heavy investment in smart city tech
- *Likely in Debate:* Oppose blanket bans on technologies; support pilot projects, self-regulation,

and risk-based approaches. Will want to balance privacy with innovation and public safety.

### China

- *Position:* Major proponent of AI-driven surveillance as part of its Safe Cities and Smart Cities initiatives. Facial recognition, predictive policing, and mass monitoring already deployed at scale.
- *Likely in Debate:* Will defend state sovereignty and the right of governments to deploy surveillance for public order, stability, and efficiency. Likely to reject external restrictions framed as human-rights conditionalities.

### Russia

- *Position:* Similar to China, invests heavily in facial recognition (Moscow's metro, public spaces). Views surveillance as critical for counter-terrorism and public security.
- *Likely in Debate:* Oppose international restrictions; emphasize national sovereignty, security, and crime prevention.

### Middle East / Gulf States (e.g., UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar)

- *Position:* Aggressively building smart cities (e.g., NEOM in Saudi Arabia, Smart Dubai) with extensive surveillance infrastructure.
- *Likely in Debate:* Support surveillance as a tool for modernization and efficiency. May be open to some

regulation for reputation and investment purposes, but will resist bans.

### India

- *Position:* Rapidly expanding smart city programs under the Smart Cities Mission. Surveillance tech widely deployed but with less robust legal safeguards.
- *Likely in Debate:* Seeks balance between modernization and rights, but leans toward permissive frameworks. May resist EU-style restrictions, but open to softer guidelines.

### African Union (AU) Member States

- *Position:* Many cities are experimenting with smart tech (often through Chinese or Western investment), but legal frameworks are still developing.
- *Likely in Debate:* Concerned about digital colonialism and foreign dependence on tech vendors. Will emphasize funding, capacity-building, and equitable access to technology, with safeguards against abuse.

### Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Mexico, Chile)

- *Position:* Mixed. Some cities deploy surveillance for crime prevention, others emphasize privacy. Brazil has a General Data Protection Law (LGPD).
- *Likely in Debate:* Push for balancing crime reduction with human rights; may align with EU on stronger protections, but also want flexibility for development.

## Japan & South Korea

- *Position:* Highly developed smart cities with strong technical standards; tend to integrate AI with governance in transparent ways.
- *Likely in Debate:* Advocate for international standards, interoperability, and risk-based regulation. Support innovation but within rights-respecting frameworks.

## Global South (Small Island States, Least Developed Countries)

- *Position:* Limited resources for smart cities, often dependent on donor countries and tech imports.
- *Likely in Debate:* Call for financial and technical assistance, stress need to avoid one-size-fits-all bans that hinder development, emphasize capacity-building and equity in AI governance

## Possible Solutions / Policy Options

A primary approach involves implementing legal constraints on intrusive surveillance technologies. The EU's AI Act serves as a model by prohibiting certain biometric applications like workplace emotion detection and mass facial image collection, while establishing stringent requirements for high-risk applications such as public facial recognition. International adoption of similar regulations could mandate that municipalities demonstrate necessity and proportionality before

deploying surveillance systems, with clear data usage boundaries and mandatory deletion protocols.

## Governance and Accountability Mechanisms

Cities could implement comprehensive assessment procedures, requiring Data Protection Impact Assessments or Algorithmic Impact Assessments before surveillance deployment. These evaluations would examine potential bias, accuracy across different populations, data retention policies, and complaint resolution processes. Independent monitoring entities—whether municipal committees, ombudsman offices, or international review bodies—would provide ongoing oversight, system auditing, and complaint investigation, reflecting emerging global standards for transparency and continuous evaluation.

## Community Engagement and Transparency

Solutions should emphasize public involvement and openness in smart city development. Drawing from UN-Habitat's People-Centred Smart Cities approach, cities should integrate community participation throughout the decision-making process. This includes pre-deployment public consultations, regular transparency reports detailing data collection and storage practices, and public disclosure of system performance metrics and audit findings. In appropriate settings, particularly non-public environments like residential or employment contexts,

informed consent should be pursued.

## Technical Safeguards

Policymakers could promote or require privacy-protective and equity-focused technical measures. Options include anonymizing identifying characteristics, implementing edge computing to maintain data locality, and conducting algorithmic fairness evaluations to ensure consistent performance across demographic categories. Organizations like ISO/IEC are developing standardized frameworks to assist cities and technology providers in risk assessment and mitigation.

## Graduated Implementation Strategies

Risk-based deployment approaches offer another pathway. Following models like the US NIST AI Risk Management Framework, cities could implement voluntary but influential evaluation tools for AI systems without imposing complete prohibitions. This approach involves limited pilot programs, assessment against criteria including effectiveness, bias, and public trust, followed by expanded deployment only after successful oversight review.

## International Collaboration and Development

Many nations, especially in developing regions, highlight the importance of global cooperation and

capacity development. UN-Habitat's international guidance warns against "digital colonialism," where cities become overly reliant on foreign technology providers. Multilateral programs could offer technical support, funding, and knowledge exchange while establishing global standards for privacy protection, cybersecurity, and equitable data management. This ensures that smart city innovations support development goals without compromising rights or widening inequalities.

## Questions to Consider / Expectations of Debate Direction

- Which uses of AI in open public spaces (if any) meet strict necessity and proportionality tests?
- Should facial recognition in public be banned, paused, or narrowly authorized with court oversight and audits? How do EU-style prohibitions shape global practice?
- What evidence (beyond arrest counts) will define success (e.g. reduction in victimization, response times, community trust)?
- What must impact assessments include (datasets, subgroup accuracy, retention, redress), and when must they be public?
- What is the deletion policy—who enforces it, and how is compliance verified?
- When should non-surveillance measures take

precedence, and how will they be funded and evaluated?

- DPIA / AIA: Data/Algorithmic Impact Assessments that evaluate risks, mitigations, and alternatives before deployment.
- Necessity & proportionality: human-rights tests requiring the least intrusive effective measure.

## Key Terms and Definitions

- Smart city: city systems that use sensors, connectivity, and analytics to improve services and governance.
- Urban surveillance: monitoring public spaces via sensors/AI to detect events or individuals.
- Facial recognition (FRT): biometric identification/verification based on facial images; the EU AI Act prohibits several related practices and restricts others.
- ALPR/ANPR: automated license-plate recognition used for enforcement and mobility management.
- Predictive policing/hotspot modeling: algorithms that forecast risk by place/time or person, often trained on historic data.
- Video analytics: AI that detects objects, behaviors, or anomalies in video streams.
- People-centered smart cities: a UN-Habitat approach prioritizing human rights, equity, and public value in digital projects.
- Data minimization & purpose limitation: collect only what's necessary; use data solely for clearly stated, lawful aims.

## Conclusion:

As the digital fabric of cities deepens, the conversation around urban surveillance has evolved from a narrow question of safety into a profound test of governance, ethics, and human rights. The integration of AI into urban systems has blurred the boundaries between innovation and intrusion, efficiency and equity. Delegates in this committee are therefore tasked not simply with regulating technologies, but with shaping the norms and institutions that will define public life in the data age.

This issue sits at the crossroads of two global imperatives: the drive to make cities smarter and more secure, and the duty to safeguard the freedoms that make them humane. In this context, the committee's work must move beyond theoretical debate to evidence-based policymaking. Delegates are expected to engage with real-world data — on effectiveness, bias, and public outcomes — and to anchor their arguments in credible sources, including academic research, historical precedents, and international best practices. The goal is not only to question whether surveillance works, but to

determine when, where, and under what conditions it works responsibly.

Proposals should integrate the lessons of existing frameworks such as the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, the NIST AI Risk Management Framework, and ISO/IEC standards on AI governance. Delegates should also explore mechanisms like algorithmic transparency, proportionality assessments, and public participation mandates, ensuring that urban innovations remain accountable to the people they serve. The committee is encouraged to debate creative solutions — from oversight boards to data trusts, privacy-by-design mandates, and global certification systems — that combine technological feasibility with democratic oversight.

At the same time, implementation remains paramount. Regulation without enforcement risks becoming symbolic; technology without safeguards risks becoming oppressive. Delegates should propose concrete pathways for monitoring compliance, verifying data practices, and ensuring that grievances are heard and redressed. The inclusion of measurable benchmarks — such as reductions in crime, improvements in emergency response, or public trust indices — will allow cities to assess progress transparently and adjust policies over time.

This conversation cannot occur in isolation. The global nature of data flows and AI markets demands cooperation that transcends borders and economic

disparities. Developed countries bear responsibility to share expertise and technology ethically, while developing regions require capacity-building and funding support to design smart-city infrastructures on their own terms. The committee should therefore consider frameworks for equitable access, international aid, and technology transfer, ensuring that digital innovation uplifts rather than divides.

Delegates must also grapple with the deeper societal implications of pervasive monitoring. Beyond privacy, urban surveillance raises questions of agency, inclusion, and legitimacy. How does constant observation affect behavior, dissent, and civic participation? What invisible biases may be reinforced when algorithms mediate public life? Addressing these questions is essential to ensuring that technology strengthens, rather than weakens, the democratic contract between citizens and the state.

The direction of this debate should be forward-looking and pragmatic: toward policies that neither idealize technology nor vilify it, but treat it as a tool to be governed wisely. Delegates should seek to bridge divergent positions — between innovation and regulation, sovereignty and universality — and focus on drafting resolutions that are actionable, measurable, and adaptable across contexts. Strong proposals will demonstrate not only moral clarity but also technical literacy and geopolitical awareness.

In the end, the question before this committee

is not whether cities will become smart, but what kind of intelligence they will embody — one defined by surveillance and control, or one grounded in transparency, accountability, and human dignity. The decisions made here will reverberate far beyond this session, shaping how future generations experience public space, digital identity, and trust in institutions. The committee’s challenge is to craft a vision of urban governance where safety and freedom reinforce rather than undermine each other — where cities of the future are not only more connected, but more just, inclusive, and humane.

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## **TOPIC B: THE ROLE OF RENT CONTROL POLICIES IN URBAN HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Background/History**

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) stands at the center of the international community’s efforts to ensure that cities are not only engines of economic growth but also places where people can live with dignity, stability, and opportunity. Its mandate, reserved in the New Urban Agenda and closely tied to Sustainable Development Goal 11, stresses the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. Housing affordability is a cornerstone of this mission, and within it, the regulation of rental markets has become an urgent global concern. As cities swell with migrants, young workers, and low-income families, the ability to secure adequate shelter increasingly determines access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods. Rent control policies—long controversial yet persistently employed—fall squarely within UN-Habitat’s purview

because they address questions of equity, stability, and sustainability in ways that transcend local borders and demand international dialogue.

At its core, rent control is about drawing a line between the rights of property owners to earn a return on their investment and the rights of tenants to live without fear of sudden eviction or crippling rent hikes. The history of rent regulation traces back to the crises of the early twentieth century, when wartime shortages and inflation prompted governments across Europe and North America to impose strict rent freezes. Over time, these rigid measures gave way to more sophisticated systems of rent stabilization, which allow rents to grow gradually, often tied to inflation, while shielding tenants from volatility. Today, rent regulation exists in diverse forms across the world. Berlin briefly adopted a Mietendeckel policy, New York has operated rent stabilization for nearly a century, Sweden relies on utility-value rent negotiations, and Canadian provinces cap annual increases with certain exemptions. In the Global South, where informal settlements dominate urban housing markets, classical rent control is less effective, but experiments with registries, eviction protections, and hybrid subsidies illustrate the global relevance of the debate. This is not a relic of past crises but a live policy frontier reshaped by globalization, financial speculation in real estate, and the accelerating urbanization of the developing world.

## Current Situation: Evolving Dynamics in

### Rent Control Policies

In 2025, rent control remains a pivotal yet contentious element in urban housing policy, reflecting the complex interplay between affordability, market dynamics, and political ideologies.

### Global Perspectives and Policy Shifts

- **Germany:** The Federal Constitutional Court's 2021 decision to annul Berlin's Mietendeckel rent freeze underscored the legal complexities of implementing localized rent controls. Subsequently, Germany's federal government proposed extending rent control laws through 2029 to address rising housing costs, despite opposition from the property sector citing potential negative impacts on investment and construction.
- **United States:** In New York City, Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani's proposal for a four-year rent freeze has ignited debates on its feasibility and implications. Critics argue that such a freeze could strain small landlords financially and lead to decreased investment in property maintenance. Additionally, the Rent Guidelines Board's recent approval of rent hikes, despite Mamdani's advocacy, highlights the

challenges in aligning political promises with institutional frameworks

### Economic and Social Implications

- *Affordability vs. Investment:* While rent control aims to protect tenants from escalating housing costs, it can inadvertently discourage new construction and maintenance of existing properties. For instance, in St. Paul, Minnesota, a 3% annual rent cap led to an 80% decrease in new building permits within three months, illustrating the potential adverse effects on housing supply
- *Tenant Protection:* Advocates emphasize that rent control policies are essential for safeguarding low-income renters from displacement and ensuring housing stability. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on their design and implementation, necessitating a balance between tenant protection and market incentives.

The discourse on rent control in 2025 reflects a nuanced understanding of its role in urban housing markets. Future policies must consider the diverse needs of tenants, landlords, and the broader community, integrating rent control measures with strategies to enhance housing supply and quality. As cities continue to grapple with housing challenges, ongoing dialogue and research will be crucial in shaping sustainable and equitable housing policies.

## Key Debates/Controversies

The controversies surrounding rent control have made it one of the most analyzed and polarizing policies in urban housing and economics. At its core, rent regulation raises fundamental questions about fairness, market efficiency, and the social responsibilities of governments in rapidly urbanizing environments. Advocates argue that rent caps are essential instruments of social justice, protecting households from sudden displacement, shielding communities from the destabilizing effects of gentrification, and preserving the cultural and social fabric of neighborhoods. Beyond immediate financial relief, rent protection can yield broader societal benefits: children maintain educational continuity, families experience reduced stress, social networks are preserved, and workers can reside closer to their employment, thereby lowering commuting emissions and contributing to more sustainable urban growth.

Supporters also emphasize the role of rent regulation in fostering inclusive cities. In areas where speculative investment drives rents far above local incomes, regulation can act as a stabilizing force, allowing marginalized and vulnerable populations to access safe and adequate housing. This, in turn, strengthens social cohesion, community engagement, and local economies, which rely on a stable resident base to support small businesses and

services.

However, critics highlight the unintended consequences that often accompany rent control. Overly stringent or poorly designed measures—especially those including strict vacancy controls that freeze rents across generations—can distort market incentives. Landlords may withdraw rental units from the market, delay necessary maintenance, or convert properties to ownership, short-term rentals, or other uses. These actions can reduce the overall housing supply, degrade the quality of existing units, and inadvertently exacerbate affordability problems for new or lower-income residents. Economists have found that in some cases, rent control disproportionately benefits long-term or higher-income tenants while newcomers and the most vulnerable continue to struggle to access housing, highlighting that the distributional effects of regulation depend heavily on policy design, enforcement, and the surrounding housing ecosystem.

This debate is further complicated by the diverse interests of multiple stakeholders, each shaping the global and local discourse around rent regulation. Tenant advocacy groups and grassroots organizations push for stronger, universal protections, such as widespread rent caps, just-cause eviction provisions, and increased public investment in rental stock. Conversely, landlord associations, private developers, and investors warn that

excessive restrictions can suppress new construction, reduce incentives for renovation, and ultimately worsen housing shortages over time. Governments are often caught between these pressures: national finance ministries and central banks worry about impacts on investment, credit markets, and economic growth, while municipal authorities face immediate social unrest if housing becomes unaffordable or displacement rises sharply.

International institutions, including UN-Habitat, the OECD, and the World Bank, have sought to mediate this tension by providing evidence-based guidance, promoting best practices, and emphasizing the need to balance equity with market sustainability. Within forums such as the United Nations, states and blocs may coalesce around competing visions of housing policy. Some advocate for housing as a fundamental human right, demanding strong legal protections and tenant-first regulations. Others prioritize supply-side interventions, market stability, and economic flexibility. A centrist approach often seeks a hybrid model, combining measured rent caps with complementary mechanisms such as targeted subsidies, new construction incentives, and inclusionary zoning policies, thereby mitigating potential negative effects while safeguarding affordability.

Ultimately, the central tension in the rent-control debate is not whether regulation can work—it clearly can—but how it is designed, implemented, and

integrated within broader housing and urban strategies. Success hinges on the careful calibration of exemptions, enforcement mechanisms, and complementary policy instruments, alongside robust monitoring and community engagement. As delegates examine this issue, they must consider not only the economic implications of rent control but also the ethical and social dimensions of housing access, as these intersect with the long-term sustainability of cities worldwide.

### **Comparative Case Study:**

#### **New York City: Zohran Mamdani and the Politics of Rent Freezes**

Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani has emerged as a prominent voice advocating for stronger tenant protections in New York City, particularly in the context of rising housing costs and economic insecurity exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Representing Astoria, Queens, Mamdani has focused on the immediate financial pressures facing renters, emphasizing that wages for many households have remained stagnant while rents and inflation continue to rise. In 2022, he championed a universal rent freeze through the city's Rent Guidelines Board, the body responsible for setting allowable rent increases for nearly one million rent-stabilized apartments, arguing that residents should not face additional financial strain during a period of public health and economic

crisis.

Mamdani's advocacy extended beyond short-term relief. He supported broader reforms such as the "Good Cause Eviction" bill, which aimed to provide tenants across the state with procedural safeguards, including protection from arbitrary eviction. These proposals reflected a recognition that stability in housing is closely linked to social equity, community cohesion, and access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment. By framing housing affordability as a human-rights issue rather than solely an economic one, Mamdani sought to mobilize both grassroots support and policy attention toward systemic solutions.

Despite widespread public backing from tenant organizations and community groups, Mamdani's proposals faced significant opposition from landlords, property associations, and real estate investors. Critics argued that a universal rent freeze could undermine financial viability, discouraging maintenance, investment, and the construction of new rental units. These concerns highlight a fundamental tension in rent-control debates: the challenge of balancing tenant protections with the incentives required to maintain and expand the rental housing stock. Ultimately, the Rent Guidelines Board approved rent increases, underscoring the political and institutional constraints that shape policy outcomes, even in a city with one of the oldest and most robust rent-

stabilization systems in the United States.

The New York experience demonstrates that local context, institutional design, and stakeholder influence are critical determinants of the effectiveness of rent-control measures. Grassroots mobilization and political advocacy, while essential, may not be sufficient in the absence of legal authority, financial mechanisms, and broad-based coalition-building that includes both tenants and landlords. Furthermore, New York's experience highlights the importance of integrating rent regulation with complementary measures such as public housing investment, subsidies for low-income households, and zoning reforms to encourage new construction, thereby mitigating potential unintended consequences of strict rent caps.

For delegates, New York offers a case study in the complexities of policy design within highly regulated and politically contested urban housing markets. It raises key questions: How can local governments implement rent protections without discouraging maintenance or new construction? What legal and financial mechanisms are necessary to ensure that freezes or caps are sustainable over time? How can tenant advocacy, community organizing, and policymaking align to produce equitable and effective housing outcomes? By analyzing Mamdani's efforts, delegates can gain insight into how local political structures, market dynamics, and civic engagement shape

the success or limitations of rent-control policies in large metropolitan contexts.

### **Berlin: The Mietendeckel Rent Freeze (2020–2021)**

Berlin provides a globally relevant example of the complexities and consequences of implementing stringent rent control measures. In February 2020, the city passed the Mietendeckel, or rent cap law, which froze rents for apartments constructed before 2014 at June 2019 levels for a planned period of five years. The policy directly affected more than 1.5 million households, representing a significant portion of the city's rental market, and aimed to curb rapidly rising rents that had increasingly burdened middle- and lower-income tenants. By imposing this cap, the city sought to provide immediate relief to residents, reduce displacement pressures, and stabilize neighborhoods experiencing gentrification.

Initially, the Mietendeckel was hailed by tenant advocacy groups as a decisive intervention against speculative real estate trends. Renters who were previously subjected to rapid rent increases saw immediate financial respite, allowing families to maintain stable housing, preserve community networks, and protect social cohesion. However, critics quickly highlighted several unintended consequences. Landlords faced a sudden reduction in rental income, which many argued discouraged investment in maintenance and improvements. Some

property owners began withdrawing units from the rental market or converting them into condominiums, while new construction slowed due to reduced financial incentives.

These market reactions underscored the delicate balance between tenant protection and long-term housing supply, illustrating that rent freezes, when implemented without complementary measures, may produce short-term relief at the cost of future availability and quality of housing.

In April 2021, the German Constitutional Court overturned the Mietendeckel, ruling that Berlin lacked the legal authority to unilaterally impose such rent controls separate from federal legislation. The court's decision had immediate and tangible consequences: tenants were required to repay months' worth of reduced rents, creating financial strain and sparking political controversy. The reversal also fueled broader debate in Germany and internationally regarding the limits of municipal authority, the role of federal law in housing policy, and the viability of aggressive rent control measures in complex, dynamic urban markets.

The Berlin experience highlights the importance of integrating legal, financial, and administrative support when designing rent control policies. While strong rent limits and freezes can quickly improve affordability and reduce displacement, they are unlikely to be sustainable without mechanisms that incentivize ongoing maintenance, ensure new housing supply, and

provide legal clarity. Berlin's case contrasts sharply with other approaches, such as New York's stabilization system advocated by Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, where incremental regulation, local oversight, and complementary policies aim to balance tenant protection with market functioning.

For delegates, the Berlin case poses a crucial set of questions: What legal frameworks must be in place to authorize municipal-level rent regulation? How can policymakers design rent controls that provide immediate tenant relief while avoiding long-term disincentives for investment and construction? What complementary measures—such as subsidies, incentives for renovation, or public housing development—are necessary to ensure rent control policies achieve sustainable urban housing outcomes? By examining Berlin, delegates can explore how ambitious rent policies can be both a tool for social equity and a potential source of market disruption if not carefully structured.

### **Possible Solutions / Policy Options**

In terms of solutions, a range of policy options has emerged from both academic research and lived practice. Some countries have adopted index-linked caps that tie rent growth to inflation, ensuring predictability for tenants while preserving landlords' capacity to cover rising costs. Others grant exemptions for new construction,

typically ten to twenty years, to avoid chilling investment while still capping older units vulnerable to speculative rent spikes. Just-cause eviction laws provide tenants with procedural security, while pass-through mechanisms for verified capital improvements or green retrofits ensure landlords maintain and upgrade their properties.

Increasingly, governments are experimenting with digital rent registries to monitor compliance, reduce illegal rent hikes, and collect vital market data. Crucially, rent control works best when paired with broader measures such as zoning reform to unlock supply, inclusionary housing requirements, targeted subsidies for low-income households, and expanded public or cooperative housing. In this sense, rent regulation is not a single solution but a component of a more holistic strategy for sustainable urban housing.

As delegates prepare to engage in this debate, several guiding questions will define the direction of the discussion. Should rent control be applied universally across urban areas, or targeted to high-pressure zones and vulnerable populations? How should governments balance tenant stability with the need for landlords to invest in maintenance and new housing? Should vacancy decontrol be preserved to encourage supply, or should stricter vacancy control be introduced in cities where speculation and displacement are most acute? What data systems and enforcement mechanisms are necessary to

ensure that regulations are more than words on paper? Finally, how should rent regulation be integrated with complementary measures such as subsidies, zoning reform, and social housing expansion, ensuring that the right to housing is upheld without sacrificing long-term sustainability? These questions highlight that rent control is not simply an economic tool but a reflection of the values societies place on fairness, stability, and the social contract between landlords and tenants.

### Terms:

- Rent control: Laws that cap the price and growth of rental housing
- Rent stabilization: A System allowing gradual, usually inflation-linked, increases
- Vacancy control/decontrol: Whether rent caps persist when tenants move out
- Just-cause eviction: limits on eviction to specific reasons
- Rent burden: The share of income spent on rent; above 30% is burdensome, above 50% severely so.
- Inclusionary zoning: Land-use policies requiring affordable units in new construction.
- Rent registry: An official database tracking lawful rents and increases.

### Conclusion:

The debate over rent control sits at the heart of how societies define the right to housing in an increasingly urbanized and unequal world. As cities become both engines of opportunity and epicenters of exclusion, governments are confronted with a fundamental dilemma: how to maintain affordability without stifling investment, and how to protect tenants without undermining the long-term sustainability of urban housing markets. The experiences of cities like New York and Berlin reveal both the promise and the peril of rent regulation—its capacity to shield millions from displacement, but also its potential to distort incentives if poorly designed or inadequately supported by complementary policies.

In the broader context of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, rent control represents more than an economic instrument—it is a test of social justice, institutional capacity, and urban governance. Its effectiveness depends on the balance between national legislation and local autonomy, the robustness of data collection and enforcement, and the ability of policymakers to adapt to evolving market dynamics. Technological innovations, such as digital rent registries and real-time housing data systems, now offer new tools for transparency and accountability, allowing governments to monitor outcomes and recalibrate policies dynamically.

Yet, rent control alone cannot resolve the structural drivers of unaffordability. Delegates must therefore consider it as one part of a broader ecosystem of reform that includes increased public and cooperative housing investment, inclusive zoning, incentives for green retrofits, and equitable access to credit. The most resilient cities will be those that weave together regulatory protection and proactive supply strategies—preventing displacement today while building the foundations for affordability tomorrow.

The path forward for the international community is one of dialogue and pragmatism. Rather than treating rent control as a binary choice between intervention and laissez-faire, this committee is urged to explore hybrid frameworks—ones that integrate data-based rent caps with measures that expand supply, enhance quality, and strengthen tenant–landlord relations. In doing so, UN-Habitat can help articulate global principles for fair and sustainable rental systems: ensuring that as cities grow denser, they also grow more just.

Ultimately, the challenge before delegates is to redefine what a “fair rent” means in the twenty-first century. It is not only a question of economics, but of dignity, community, and the social contract that binds citizens to the cities they call home. The success of rent regulation, and of sustainable urban development more broadly, will hinge on whether global and local actors

can cooperate to balance stability with innovation—protecting the right to housing while enabling cities to thrive.