THE STRATEGIC PLAN
ABRIDGED VERSION
2020-2023
"A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL IN AN URBANIZING WORLD"
UN-HABITAT
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ABRIDGED VERSION
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UN-HABITAT
UN-HABITAT’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SDGS

Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Domain of change 1: Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum
- Outcome 1.1: basic services, mobility and public space
- Outcome 1.2: land and housing
- Outcome 1.3: settlements growth and regeneration

Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Domain of change 2: Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions
- Outcome 2.1: spatial connectivity and productivity
- Outcome 2.2: locally generated revenues
- Outcome 2.3: frontier technologies and innovations

Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Domain of change 3: Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment
- Outcome 3.1: greenhouse gas emissions and air quality
- Outcome 3.2: resource efficiency and ecological assets
- Outcome 3.3: adaptation to climate change

Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Domain of change 4: Effective urban crisis prevention and response
- Outcome 4.1: social integration
- Outcome 4.2: living standards of migrants
- Outcome 4.3: resilience of built environment
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ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION AS A DRIVER OF DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE TO IMPROVE LIVING CONDITIONS FOR ALL.
Urbanization is one of the global megatrends of our time, unstoppable and irreversible. In 30 years from now, two-thirds of the world’s population is likely to live in urban areas. Ninety per cent of urban growth will occur in less developed regions, such as East Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, at a rapid pace and in situations in which capacity and resources are most constrained and development challenges most intense. Urbanization in those parts of the world is largely unplanned, fuelling the continuous growth of informal or slum settlements.

Over the past 20 years over 75 per cent of the world’s cities have grown more unequal, both in developing and developed countries. Today, the gap between the rich and the poor in most countries is at its highest level in 30 years; the global top one per cent of earners have captured twice as much of that growth as the 50 per cent poorest.¹

Slums and informal settlements, which currently accommodate close to 1 billion people, are the physical manifestation of urban poverty and inequality. In 2015, some 2.3 billion people worldwide still lacked access to basic sanitation services and 2.1 billion people lacked access to clean drinking water.²

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing cities. Cities account for between 60 and 80 per cent of energy consumption and generate as much as 70 per cent of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, primarily through the consumption of fossil fuels for energy supply and transportation.

Urgent and radical action to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is required well before 2030. Urban areas also absorb significant climate risks and must be prepared to withstand the climatic extremes of global warming.

The current economic model of investment, consumption and growth also drives the exploitative extraction of the planet’s natural assets, as urban development is increasingly occupying land that was previously used for forestry or food production.

Migration adds further complexity to the issues facing cities and other human settlements. There are 763 million internal migrants and 244 million international migrants globally.³ That means that every seventh person in the world is a migrant. Most of these migrants are found in urban areas and require special attention in the overall context of sustainable urbanization.

Gender-based discrimination persists in many parts of the world and challenges associated with children, youth, older people and people with disability are growing. As the world witnesses an increased feminization of poverty, women are disproportionately affected by limited skills and limited access to safe places of work, education, resources and technology.

In sum, the challenges posed by the current model of urbanization have global ramifications that, if not addressed adequately, could jeopardize the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the challenges, urbanization is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for change at all levels and for all types of human settlements, from small rural communities, villages and market towns to medium-sized cities and huge metropolises. The UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 commits to the premise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind.

Through its normative and operational work and in its coordination and focal point role within the UN system, UN-Habitat pursues the objective to advance sustainable urbanization as a driver of development and peace to improve living conditions for all. If we get our cities right, it will be easier to attain other development goals and targets and achieve meaningful progress in realizing gender equality and the inclusion of youth. However, that will require creativity, human and financial capital, and joint efforts at the local, national, regional and global levels in countries at every stage of development.

The Strategic Plan repositions UN-Habitat as a major global entity, a centre of excellence and innovation. In that respect, the organization is refocusing its niche position as the “thought leader” and “go-to” programme for issues pertaining to its work, setting the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, driving political discussion, generating specialized and cutting-edge knowledge, shaping technical norms, principles and standards, and acting as a multiplier in the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practice in getting cities and other human settlements right.

Working in collaboration with research institutions, UN-Habitat is exceptionally positioned and equipped to play that role. A focus on normative work repositions the organization in the framework of the reform of the United Nations development system by emphasizing its unique value and demonstrating its readiness to contribute in a meaningful manner to the identification of national and regional problems, challenges and opportunities.

The Strategic Plan promotes transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind. This work is grouped under four mutually reinforcing and integrated Domains of Change. To ensure that those furthest behind are targeted first, the Domains of Change are underpinned by a human-rights-based approach with five social inclusion dimensions.
UN-Habitat theory of change for the Strategic Plan for the period 2020–2023

A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world

UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind

Sustainable urbanization is advanced as a driver of development and peace, to improve living conditions for all in line with the SDGs

**Vision**

**Mission**

**Objective**

**Outcomes**

**Domains of Change**

**Social inclusion issues:** (1) Human rights; (2) Gender; (3) Children, youth and Older Persons; (4) Disability

**Crosscutting thematic areas:** (1) Resilience; (2) Safety
DOMAIN OF CHANGE 1: 
Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban–rural continuum

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing the basic human rights of the millions of marginalized urban dwellers living in poverty and subject to marginalization. Expanding their access to basic services such as adequate housing, clean drinking water, sanitation, and others is an important aspect to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. Within poor communities, inequality also persists as women, youth and persons with disability often suffer intersectional discrimination, which leads to further marginalization.

Poverty and marginalization intersect and are often concentrated in specific locations. Spatial inequality manifests in the different rights, experiences and opportunities that people may have, between regions, across the rural–urban continuum or within the same city. Spatial inequalities in cities perpetuate other forms of social, economic, political or cultural inequality.

Unequal access to land, housing, employment opportunities, basic services, public transport, and public space are key aspects of spatial inequality, effecting poverty levels and opportunities for upward mobility. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, living in a deprived neighbourhood can have an impact on the education, health and work prospects of both children and adults and deepen inequalities, even across generations. In order to reduce spatial inequalities and eradicate poverty, planned urban growth must be accompanied by effective urban regeneration, offering the benefit of preserving cultural heritage and helping to build a sense of identity and belonging in cities. The first domain of change thus translates into three key outcome areas to which UN-Habitat, working with partners, contributes:

(a) Increased and equal access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space;
(b) Increased and secure access to land, and adequate and affordable housing;
(c) Effective settlement growth and regeneration.

UN-Habitat’s niche and Partnerships:

The outcomes in this domain of change represent the core business of UN-Habitat, consolidating its vast experience in the area of basic services, housing and slum upgrading, land, urban mobility and public space. The International Guidelines on Decentralization and Access to Basic Services for all and the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning are essential frameworks for guiding outputs within this domain.

Further normative guidance and the extensive experience of UN-Habitat in implementing field projects in the areas of public space, sustainable mobility, water and sanitation, basic social and physical infrastructure and energy, contributes to scale up efforts in these areas.

The expanded focus on effective settlement growth and regeneration is in response to explicit demands for UN-Habitat support by partners.

In exercising its focal point role, UN-Habitat will also collaborate with a number of other United Nations coordination bodies, including UN-Water, UN Energy, Sustainable the Energy for All initiative and the Sustainable Mobility for All initiative; other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and many non-governmental partners and stakeholders and private-sector partners.

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In the current global economy, urbanization contributes a disproportionately high share of GDP. Well-planned and properly managed urbanization can generate wealth, maximizing the benefits of economies of scale and agglomeration, allowing for integrated territorial development and connecting rural and urban development.

Genuinely inclusive, well-connected and prosperous cities promote collective well-being and fulfilment for all. Achieving balanced territorial development and overcoming inequalities requires combining economic growth strategies with socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable development. Prosperous cities are likely to be located in prosperous regions.

Efficient and adequate regional planning is essential for cities to rethink their comparative advantage and better reposition themselves within their surrounding areas to increase the likelihood of generating decent jobs and livelihoods across the region.

This domain of change translates into the following three key outcome areas in which UN Habitat, working with partners, contributes:

- Improved spatial connectivity and productivity of cities and regions;
- Increased and equitably distributed locally generated revenues;
- Expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations for urban development.

UN-Habitat’s niche and Partnerships

In this domain of change, UN-Habitat needs to amplify its knowledge and expertise. The expanded focus on connectivity and regional planning is determined by several studies that demonstrate the strong connection between urban and regional planning to promote shared prosperity.

Working with strategic partners, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and others, UN-Habitat will support efforts by government authorities at different levels to develop policies, frameworks and actions to boost the productivity of cities and regions through an integrated territorial development approach.

Working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization, IOM, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other organizations, UN-Habitat will promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all, particularly women and youth, through specific policies and actions.

Outcome 2 requires UN-Habitat to cooperate with regional development banks, local and regional governments and their associations, UNDP, the World Bank, the European Union, financial institutions, foundations and academia. From an organizational perspective, the niche position of UN Habitat focuses on providing technical support to local, regional and national authorities to formulate and implement policies and strategies to increase local revenue and ensure an equitable allocation thereof. UN-Habitat will continue to consolidate its considerable experience in this area.

Outcome 3 represents an expanded focus. In exercising a focal point role, UN-Habitat will collaborate with various entities, such as the United Nations Innovation Network, United Nations agencies, technology companies, “smart city” associations, innovation hubs and academia. UN-Habitat will thus adapt and expand innovative technical solutions for improved quality of life in cities.
The New Urban Agenda sets out a shared vision for cities and other human settlements towards strengthened climate action responses and an improved urban environment. Member States recognize the unprecedented threats to cities and human settlements from unsustainable consumption and production patterns, loss of biodiversity, pressure on ecosystems, pollution, natural and human-made disasters, and climate change and its related risks, undermining the efforts to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions and to achieve sustainable development.5

They commit themselves to facilitating the sustainable management of natural resources in cities and other human settlements.6 In response to the increasing challenges posed by climate change, Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have developed nationally determined contributions as a commitment to the Paris Agreement. In 2017, a review by UN-Habitat of 164 nationally determined contributions found that 113 had moderate or strong urban content.7

This domain of change focuses on the intersection of cities and other human settlements with climate and the environment. It addresses the resilience, adaptation and mitigation actions for the development of sustainable cities through curbing the impact of climate change, creating new economic opportunities and improving liveability in cities and other human settlements.

It comprises three outcomes that strengthen climate action and improve urban environments in order to create systemic change by designing integrated solutions targeting patterns of human life and the built and natural environments in cities:

- (g) Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality;
- (h) Improved resource efficiency and protection of ecological assets;
- (i) Effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change.

**UN-Habitat’s niche and Partnerships**

In this domain of change, UN-Habitat will act as a catalyst for connections and action in the global climate arena, linking global actors and policies to local and national contexts. It will build that linkage through a strategically designed process which combines policy advice, technical support, advocacy, thematic expertise, knowledge production and sharing of international best practice.

UN Habitat climate action programmes will thus create a platform to facilitate bidirectional linkage – from global to local and local to global – as local and regional governments engage in the processes. In the area of adaptation, building climate resilience of the urban poor will be an area of attention.

In order to support Member States in undertaking climate action and improving the urban environment, UN-Habitat will work together with United Nations agencies, such as UNEP, to mainstream environmental considerations into local, national and global urban policymaking and to highlight the local–global element of environmental issues. It will also work with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to enhance awareness of climate change matters and to disseminate knowledge and international best practice to support the implementation of climate change strategies. Furthermore, it will work with the World Health Organization (WHO) to assist Governments in developing and implementing clean air action plans.

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5 New Urban Agenda, para. 63.
6 New Urban Agenda, para. 65.
DOMAin of change 4:  
Effective urban crisis prevention and response

Global crises are increasingly complex and multi-dimensional; interconnected across geographical and regional boundaries, cyclical, recurrent and increasingly urban and protracted in nature. The United Nations system recognizes that social and spatial inequalities, unplanned growth, unequal access to land, affordable housing and basic services, and pressure on natural resources all contribute to an accumulation of disaster risk, instability and potential conflict.

Many of those causes are linked to flawed development and, in most cases, the impact of crisis is particularly severe for the urban poor, the displaced and others who are already chronically vulnerable.

Effective urban crisis prevention, urban risk management and preparedness involve approaches to urban development that are sensitive to both risk and conflict. Effective crisis prevention, response and recovery requires a strong focus on social cohesion and inclusive planning. Growing inequalities and increased exposure to natural hazards exacerbate the vulnerabilities of specific groups, fuelling instability to the point at which humanitarian assistance is needed.

Considering the increased complexity and urban nature of crises, a focus on resilience and crises response, of both systems and people, is critical for stability and sustainable development.

Furthermore, a rights-based approach is required that gives attention to women, children, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities in both host and displaced communities.

This domain of change translates into three interrelated outcomes, relevant to both crisis prevention and crisis response:

(j) Enhanced social integration and inclusive communities;

(k) Improved living standards and inclusion of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees through effective crisis response and recovery;

(l) Enhanced resilience of the built environment and infrastructure.

UN-Habitat’s niche and Partnerships

Based on its decades-long experience in crisis-affected countries and its specific expertise in urban and other human settlements, UN-Habitat seeks to (a) improve the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in countries affected by conflict and natural and human-caused disasters; (b) ensure that its work contributes to the United Nations system commitment to sustaining peace and a whole-of-system response to complex emergencies; (c) improve support to Member States in implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; and (d) improve support to Member States facing challenges caused by the mass influx of migrants.

UN-Habitat can offer integrated solutions in support of broader humanitarian, development and political efforts led by other United Nations entities, particularly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The work of UN-Habitat on land, for example, supports the broader conflict prevention work led by UNDP, the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations (DPA), the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and others. UN-Habitat will contribute its expertise to United Nations networks such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Network on Migration and provide urban advisory services to Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators.
Six social inclusion dimension and cross-cutting thematic areas that will be reflected in UN-Habitat’s initiatives:

**Human rights** - Urbanization can only be sustainable if it is human rights based and living conditions can only be improved for all if human rights are protected and promoted.

**Gender-based discrimination** - Discrimination against individuals because of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation is addressed through ensuring effective participation in decision-making and in programme implementation.

**Older persons, children and youth** are often excluded from access to housing, urban basic services, public spaces and infrastructure, and the overall benefits of urbanization.

**Disability** - more than 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in poverty and face barriers related to access to housing, transport, technology and employment.

**Resilience** - ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through shocks and stresses, whether natural or human-made, while adapting positively and transforming towards sustainability.

**Safety** - aiming for a world free of fear and violence where human habitats are safe.

Four Drivers of change to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan:

**Policy and legislation** - National urban policies establish synergetic connections between the dynamics of urbanization and national development. Clear and transparent legal frameworks for urban development can provide a solid, forward-looking framework to guide urban development, based on accountability, the rule of law and clear implementation mechanisms.

**Urban planning and design** can reconcile competing interests regarding city form and functionality through integrative and political participatory processes.

**Governance** encompasses the different ways in which public and private actors participate in the planning, design and management of a city. Weak institutions and poor governance mechanisms increase the risk of low performance, wasted resources, human rights violations and an overall lack of progress.

**Financing mechanisms** shape the ability of local and national governments to make effective use of funds for sustainable development.

Six organizational performance enablers allow for greater efficiency, effectiveness and impact, to influence and leverage the actions of other stakeholders, and initiate and sustain transformative action within UN-Habitat

(i) monitoring and knowledge, (ii) innovation, (iii) advocacy, communication and outreach, (iv) partnerships, (v) capacity-building, and (vi) systems and processes.
PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation are critical elements of results-based management and together constitute the basis of UN-Habitat transparency and accountability vis-à-vis partners and donors.

Performance information from monitoring and evaluation will be used more systematically to take corrective action, enhance programmatic and organizational decision making and accountability, and ensure that results are achieved, and outputs delivered effectively and efficiently.

In addition, information on monitoring and evaluation will be used for organizational learning. By sharing findings and lessons learned both internally and with Member States and partners, UN-Habitat will use a state-of-the-art Monitoring and Evaluation system to drive performance measurement.

Through regular briefings, dashboards, and quarterly and annual progress reports, information on monitoring and evaluation will be used to hold UN-Habitat accountable to Member States by communicating the extent to which resources are efficiently and effectively being used to achieve results.

FINANCING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

UN-Habitat will use its knowledge and convening capacity to attract funding and financing for the achievement of the Strategic Plan and the implementation of the urban dimension of the SDGs respectfully. Urbanization is known to be an engine of economic growth and, as such, can attract investment. It will be the role of UN-Habitat to work with partners to ensure that investment in urban development means investment in sustainable urban development.

Speed, scale and cost efficiency will be achieved by leveraging the roles, capacities and resources of United Nations agencies and partners, and of other actors, including development banks, the private sector, cooperatives and communities, towards achieving scalable urban interventions that catalyse positive change.