



**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

**First open-ended meeting/
High-level midterm review**

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**Midterm review of the implementation of the strategic
plan of the United Nations Human Settlements
Programme for the period 2020–2023**

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the United Nations Human Settlements Programme for the
period 2020–2023**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. The midterm review of the implementation of the strategic plan for 2020–2023 has been prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/239, in which the Assembly welcomed the report of the Open-ended Working Group established by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/226, and endorsed its findings and recommendations, including that a midterm review of the strategic plan be conducted. The strategic plan was endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives in 2018 and subsequently approved by the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in 2019. After a brief presentation of the strategic plan, the present report presents the methodology and scope of the review. The global coronavirus disease pandemic has had a direct influence on the implementation of the strategic plan, as noted in the analysis of the current global context. A new organizational structure was adopted to support institutional change, and this included the expansion of the Programme's catalytic function, the redefinition of collaboration and strategic partnerships and the role of the regional offices and the strengthening of data collection systems. Important results have been achieved against the various domains of change and 12 outcome areas of the strategic plan. The report concludes with a reflection on lessons gleaned in the first 15 months of implementation and opportunities to advance the strategic plan in the second half of its term. The concluding sections highlight the important global role that the urban agenda will have in 2022, including the preparation of the high-level meeting to assess progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the need to conceptually align the strategic plan with the recently approved quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and the preparations for the external midterm evaluation of the strategic plan in 2022.

* HSP/OECPR.2021/1.

I. Legislative mandate

2. The UN-Habitat strategic plan for 2020–2023 was endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat at its seventy-first regular meeting, on 6 December 2018, and subsequently approved by the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme at its first session, held in May 2019 in Nairobi.
3. In its resolution 73/239, the General Assembly welcomed the report of the Open-ended Working Group (established by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/226) and endorsed its findings and recommendations, including the recommendation that the Committee of Permanent Representatives convene in Nairobi, in an open-ended manner, twice every four years: once prior to the UN-Habitat Assembly in preparation for that session and a second time for a high-level midterm review.
4. As prescribed by rule 2 (f) of the rules of procedure of the UN-Habitat Assembly, which states that the UN-Habitat Assembly examines and approves the UN-Habitat strategic plan, the Committee of Permanent Representatives will, during its high-level midterm review in June 2021, conduct a midterm review of the implementation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan, as well as the implementation of the resolutions and decisions of the UN-Habitat Assembly.
5. The Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, at its first meeting, held on 1 October 2019, also recommended that the midterm review of the implementation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan be included on the agenda of the Committee of Permanent Representatives for each of its high-level midterm review meetings.

II. Presentation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023

6. The UN-Habitat strategic plan for 2020–2023 was developed taking into account General Assembly resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, including the Sustainable Development Goals; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants; and the New Urban Agenda.
7. The development of the strategic plan was underpinned by a new organizational structure designed to make UN-Habitat more outcome-focused and fit for the purpose of supporting national and local governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as fulfilling other global commitments. The strategic plan aims to create the normative and operational conditions for Member States and cities to implement the global urban development agendas, supported by data, evidence, technical advisory services and capacity-building actions.
8. Whereas the strategic plan for 2014–2019 and its subprogrammes were organized around UN-Habitat technical areas of expertise, the strategic plan for 2020–2023 focuses on drivers of change and performance enablers to achieve results. Four interlinked, mutually reinforcing subprogrammes, or “domains of change”, were established to replace the seven subprogrammes of 2014–2019 (see annex I).
9. The domains of change are supported by the social inclusion dimensions of human rights; gender; children, youth and older persons; and disability, designed to redress long-standing discrimination against, and continued marginalization of, these and other excluded groups. They also reflect the three transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda: (a) sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty; (b) sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and (c) environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.
10. Framing the domains of change around key global priorities allows UN-Habitat to leverage its mandate and expertise through integrated efforts in areas such as fighting poverty and overcoming inequality, fuelling sustainable economic growth by innovation, addressing the climate emergency and preventing and overcoming crises.

III. Methodology and scope of the midterm review

11. Implementation of the strategic plan began on 1 January 2020. The scope of this midterm review, conducted two years after the approval of the strategic plan and 15 months into its implementation, is limited to the period January 2020–March 2021. An independent external midterm evaluation of the strategic plan will be conducted in the first quarter of 2022.

12. This document is based on an internal assessment exercise of reflecting on lessons and achievements in the first period of the plan's implementation, with all divisions and regional structures of the Programme contributing to the review. As a complement to the UN-Habitat annual progress report for 2020, *Working for a Better Urban Future*,¹ this document allows for a strategic analysis of the drivers, results areas and outcomes to date. It is presented as a stock-taking exercise for communicating progress towards 2023 expected and aggregated results, as well as lessons and opportunities that will inform implementation going forward.

13. In addition to the self-assessment against results areas, this midterm review is also informed by the first meeting of the Executive Board and the sessions of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters. It covers all performance areas defined in the results framework for the implementation of the strategic plan. It also takes into consideration evaluations performed prior to the strategic plan or after its approval that are directly related to the implementation of the plan, along with their recommendations.²

14. The findings and recommendations of the independent programmatic evaluation of the UN-Habitat 2014–2019 strategic plan³ were also considered in this review, including management's response to the recommendations to date.

15. In the first 15 months of implementation of the strategic plan, UN-Habitat demonstrated progress in establishing a revised organizational structure to support institutional change, enhanced development of strategic partnerships and strengthened outcomes of its catalytic function for achieving sustainable development.

16. It is important to note that the first 15 months of implementation coincided with the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which served as a sort of "stress test" of the strategic plan and its capacity to guide UN-Habitat in meeting the priorities of Member States and stakeholders during a period of unprecedented uncertainty. While some areas of the strategic plan are presented for further refinement based on lessons learned and observations made during this period, the assessment also showed that the strategic plan is a highly robust instrument that enables the leading role of UN-Habitat in supporting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and achievement of the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals. The plan has provided significant latitude for adapting to the needs of human settlements in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, while also enabling effective contributions to the four domains of change for sustainable development.

IV. Reporting and accountability frameworks

17. The Final Evaluation of the Implementation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Strategic Plan 2014–2019, produced in October 2020 by independent consultants, generated six recommendations to "capitalize on [the Programme's] strength and overcome chronic challenges and risks in a strategic and prioritized way in close coordination with the Executive Board."⁴

18. In line with those recommendations, UN-Habitat has adopted a risk-based approach in its implementation of the strategic plan for 2020–2023. This includes putting in place a risk management strategy, a clear accountability framework, regional and country operations strategies with consequent accountabilities, and a project approval process that has been improved by establishing the Programme Review Committee to ensure project quality and alignment with the strategic plan and its results framework.⁵

¹ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/annual_progress_report_2018.pdf.

² Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations from the programme evaluation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (E/AC.51/2018/2); Evaluation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (E/AC.51/2015/2).

³ Final Evaluation of the Implementation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Strategic Plan 2014–2019. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/final_evaluation_of_the_implementation_of_the_unhabitat_strategic_plan_2014-2019.pdf.

⁴ The recommendations stemming from the independent evaluation were: (a) capitalize on strengths and leadership role in sustainable urbanization; (b) communicate successes for wider influence; (c) link operational and normative programming for greater impact; (d) improve core systems; (e) strengthen measurement and tracking of results and learning outcomes; and (f) engage with key stakeholders, including the Executive Board, on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of UN-Habitat in key programmes, particularly in emerging areas of importance for the mandate of UN-Habitat.

⁵ Progress in the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023: draft results framework (HSP/EB.2020/9/Rev.1).

19. UN-Habitat further developed a results-based management policy, approved by the Executive Board, in decision 2020/3, at its second session in 2020.⁶ The policy is a key institutional enabler for reporting results against the strategic plan from 2021 onwards. The results-based management policy focuses on data and evidence, defining results at the level of outcomes and impact, with targets and performance indicators. This will make annual reporting more credible through working with verifiable data at the project, programme and corporate levels to support performance reports.

20. In decision 2020/3, the Executive Board also endorsed the results framework for the implementation of the strategic plan. The roll-out of the framework in 2021 is a crucial step towards the development of a monitoring and evaluation system, which will be supported by a performance measurement plan that will track progress against indicators and baseline data and establish milestones within the strategic plan framework. This will include all domains of change, as well as indicators for the catalytic function of UN-Habitat.

21. The results framework is being incorporated into the project approval, monitoring and reporting systems, to strengthen delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and other global development agendas across all units and operations of the Programme.

22. To ensure that project proposals are aligned with the strategic plan, the Programme Review Committee, chaired by the Deputy Executive Director, was established in April 2020, replacing the Project Advisory Group. Guidelines for process flow, including the appropriate delegation of authority to regional and branch level heads, were issued in October 2020. The Programme Review Committee undertakes a formal and rigorous review of new projects, ensures quality assurance and contributes to the alignment of institutional objectives against the domains of change.⁷

V. The strategic plan in the current global context

23. The global COVID-19 pandemic directly influenced the implementation of the strategic plan during its first year. The first cases appeared in urban areas, prompting many to question the role, function, form and future of cities. These concerns deepened as restrictions to contain transmission brought urban economies to a standstill. In the months that followed, the understanding of the complex relationship between cities and COVID-19 evolved, providing evidence that urban density is not in itself a decisive factor in the transmission of the virus. Research has shown that the key determinants of risk are spatial, social and economic inequalities; lack of access to adequate housing and basic services; and inadequate urban structures that undermine resilience and response capacities.

24. In March 2020, UN-Habitat quickly designed its COVID-19 policy and programmatic framework⁸ to guide the Programme's immediate response, prioritizing outcomes across the strategic plan. This allowed adaptation of existing programmes towards the COVID-19 response and prioritized allocation of additional emergency funds.

25. A further adjustment of policy priorities has begun to emerge as the world is preparing to "build back better" and address the range of the underlying inequalities revealed during the past year. To remain relevant to Member States, UN-Habitat will need to review the priorities of both donor and recipient countries and adjust implementation to changing funding and investment profiles.

26. Early in the pandemic, UN-Habitat initiated major analytical work on understanding and anticipating significant transformations in cities and urban communities. This work is reflected in the report *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* (March 2021).⁹ The report revisits UN-Habitat normative guidance for recovery and rebuilding. It focuses on themes that align with the strategic plan's subprogrammes and indicates areas for adjustments in the plan's goals and approaches in the face of the pandemic.

27. Through this research and related findings, the strategic plan has demonstrated its ability to address spatial inequalities (domain of change 1), the need for integrated territorial responses to recovery (domain of change 2) and the combined climate, socioeconomic and health crises (domain of change 3), as well as demonstrating that UN-Habitat has the tools needed for immediate crisis response and prevention capacity (domain of change 4). The implementation of the strategic plan

⁶ Progress in the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023: draft results-based management policy (HSP/EB.2020/8). https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/09/english_8.pdf.

⁷ As at 31 December 2020, the Programme Review Committee had reviewed 131 project proposals and approved 129 projects, representing approximately \$190 million in earmarked funds.

⁸ "UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan", available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf.

⁹ <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-report-on-cities-and-pandemics-towards-a-more-just-green-and-healthy-future>.

situates national urban policies, affordable housing, inclusive urban planning and other core urban development objectives as central means of mitigating the crisis and advancing towards sustainability.

VI. A new organizational structure to support institutional change

28. To support the implementation of the strategic plan for 2020–2023 and its outcome-based design, the organizational structure of UN-Habitat was updated to make it more fit for purpose. The aim was to facilitate more integrated programming, as recommended in the 2014–2019 strategic plan independent evaluation, and to allow for scaling of the impact of the Programme’s work.

29. Extensive consultations led to a new structure, which was then translated into a corporate matrix that clarifies responsibilities, accountabilities and coordination. The new structure balances normative work, led by headquarters, and operational work, led by the regional and country presence. Communities of practice have been established around each domain of change and areas of technical expertise that cut across headquarters and regional and country offices.

30. The new organizational structure allows for better articulation of the Programme’s added value and has enabled UN-Habitat to respond to the changing needs of Member States more effectively, with more efficient ways of working.

A. Expanding the catalytic function of UN-Habitat

31. The effectiveness of UN-Habitat will in part depend on its ability to convene, facilitate and invest in programmes and projects that can be scaled up and attract co-investments for sustainability. Three focus areas will improve this catalytic function: (a) strengthening the capacity of Member States and other partners, local governments and communities to scale up urban solutions; (b) reaching out to the private sector to co-invest in financing sustainable urbanization through the City Investment Facility; and (c) supporting the United Nations system through ensuring that sustainable urbanization is part of the common country assessment process.

32. Closer collaboration between the regional and country offices and the new Global Solutions Division, with its normative pillar (Urban Practices Branch) and its programme development pillar (Programme Development Branch), allows better mobilization of the global normative expertise of UN-Habitat in support of country operations, thereby improving the integration of contributions into the outcomes of the strategic plan’s domains of change.

B. Redefining collaboration and building strategic partnerships

33. Partnership is at the heart of the strategic plan to expand innovation, scale, resource mobilization and expertise and accelerate action in support of Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the 2030 Agenda. The partnership approach is key to mainstreaming sustainable urbanization efforts into development agendas at all levels. Since January 2020, UN-Habitat has signed agreements with 191 partners: Governments (51), United Nations entities (18), local governments (26) and civil society organizations (96).

34. UN-Habitat has strengthened its strategic partnerships with Regional Economic Commissions and United Nations entities, including through global agreements signed with United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, and its country-level collaboration with entities such as the World Food Programme in various countries in Africa.

35. As the focal point for sustainable urbanization in the United Nations system, UN-Habitat is also focusing on operationalizing the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development endorsed by the Chief Executive Board in 2019, focusing on more strategic partnerships related to data, integrated policy support, financing and partnerships.

36. As part of the global harmonized approach to reporting, UN-Habitat has worked with partners to develop the Global Urban Monitoring Framework to support global reporting on progress on the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals and national and local agendas, ensuring a more integrated response.

37. A partner information management system is being developed to provide relevant information on partners’ contributions and to give a voice to stakeholders who wish to share their experiences in partnering with UN-Habitat.

C. The role of regional offices in the strategic plan

38. The four UN-Habitat regional offices strengthen accountability for the global implementation of the strategic plan, by working in diverse contexts to define adapted approaches that respond to regional priorities. The regional offices have developed, within the common results framework, targeted regional strategies to address the priorities of national and local governments and regional concerns and commitments.

39. The Regional Office for Arab States implements the strategic plan with a focus on accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals while addressing the region's most pressing urban challenges. Key areas of intervention in 2020 included support for evidence-based local, regional and national decisions through national urban policies; urban profiling and strategic urban planning; support for urban recovery and reconstruction actions in post-conflict and post-disaster settings; protection of housing land and property rights of internally displaced persons, returnees and refugees; and increasing equal access to basic services. UN-Habitat expertise in urban crisis and rapid response proved critical in responding immediately to the Beirut blast and identifying the most affected areas to inform a targeted rapid response. In Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and the Sudan, UN-Habitat applied the social tenure domain model to respond to land tenure challenges and enable an efficient housing/land/property information system. To address the growing challenge of water scarcity in the region, UN-Habitat in Egypt continues to support innovative technological approaches that provide cost-efficient solutions for quick access to water and sanitation for vulnerable communities.

40. The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific guides country project design and monitors implementation to ensure alignment between the strategic plan and country priorities. Within the Asia-Pacific Regional Collaborative Platform, the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific liaises with other United Nations entities at the regional and country levels to monitor joint initiatives that address national government and United Nations country priorities, as well as defining the contribution of UN-Habitat. The region has customized global normative tools that provide practical solutions to local needs, including in people-centred and community-driven recovery assistance; work with Member States on climate adaptation, mitigation, solid waste management, plastic pollution and marine litter issues; and facilitation of city-to-city learning, knowledge-sharing and technical cooperation.

41. The Regional Office for Africa developed a regional strategy for 2020–2023 that adapts the strategic plan outcomes to the African context. Key pillars include collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union towards achieving sustainable urbanization on the continent.¹⁰ In 2020, the Regional Office for Africa operationalized an initiative on sustainable urbanization for transformative, resilient and peaceful cities in Africa for implementation at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. The Regional Office for Africa develops products aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, using urbanization as an entry point. At the country level, the focus is placed on adaptation to needs, engagement with United Nations reform and building on in-house expertise in line with the global strategy and commitments of UN-Habitat.

42. The Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean operates in a regional context of high inequalities, low productivity and institutional weaknesses. Its regional strategy includes policy advisory services in countries without a programmatic presence and spans all four domains of change, including housing and urban regeneration, urban prosperity and territorial economic development, social cohesion and integration (with an emphasis on migrants) and climate change adaptation. The strategy includes the strengthening of the regional office and its network of offices in the region, as well as alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

43. In countries of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Programme Development Branch of UN-Habitat provides direct programming support to priority countries, with oversight by the Regional Programmes Division and the support of the Spain and Russia offices.

44. UN-Habitat has worked with several Member States, including in the subregions of the Western Balkans and South Caucasus and in Central Asia, to provide on-demand support on sustainable urban development issues to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams as they develop common country assessments and cooperation frameworks. In line with the strategic plan, UN-Habitat also works with the Economic Commission for Europe on policy support projects such as smart sustainable cities.

¹⁰ This is the case with the preparation of the harmonized implementation framework for the New Urban Agenda in Africa and the development of a policy brief on COVID-19 in African cities.

VII. UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023: main results

45. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged but also reaffirmed the value of the strategic plan, which serves as both a framework for recovery and a roadmap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The vision of “a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world” continues to guide UN-Habitat in its purpose and in seeking results. By redefining strategic partnerships, reconceptualizing its catalytic role, strengthening the knowledge component of the strategy and refocusing its programmes and actions, UN-Habitat has been able to identify key elements of sustainable urbanization and deploy them when advising local and national governments over the past 15 months.

46. Its increasingly integrated approach has positioned UN-Habitat as a strategic partner for public and private investors. For example, UN-Habitat is supporting the Global Future Cities Programme as a knowledge partner to steer investment in 19 cities across 10 countries for 30 urban transformative projects, for a total investment of \$80 million. It is providing technical support to the Mexican Government in the Maya train project through regional and urban planning for the creation of sustainable communities and *ex ante* evaluation studies. These tools and methodologies are being scaled up in the “Sustainable Development Goal cities” flagship programme, which will provide a toolkit and process for cities to achieve Sustainable Development Goals through support in monitoring, gap analysis and investment readiness. In addition, the City Investment Facility will serve as a clearing house for urban projects in close collaboration with large-scale investors from the public, private and multilateral sectors.

47. The strengthened project review and approval process now requires that new projects identify their primary, secondary (indirect impact) and tertiary (limited/partial impact) outcomes in the strategic plan. Project teams work in collaboration, integrating the different drivers and enablers identified into the strategic plan and drawing on the tools of the UN-Habitat catalogue of services. The review process also identifies innovative projects with potential for replication and corporate strategic value. They are used to strengthen integration between normative and operational activities, allowing learning from field operations.

48. This approach is of even greater importance now that certain outcomes have been prioritized in the work programmes for 2021 and 2022 due to funding shortfalls. The strategic plan allows UN-Habitat to pursue co-benefits through prioritized outcomes, such as through projects that target basic services and mobility (outcome 1.1) while delivering a concrete impact in terms of climate adaptation, resource efficiency and urban environment (outcomes 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3).

A. Domain of change 1: reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum

49. This domain of change focuses on fighting poverty and inequality in communities through increased and equal access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space; increased and secure access to land, and adequate and affordable housing; and effective settlements growth and regeneration.

50. *Outcome 1.1 – Increased and equal access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space:* UN-Habitat has supported the most deprived neighbourhoods in addressing sanitation and accessibility gaps, which affect health, education and work prospects, especially during the pandemic. One publication, five technical material products and over 15 seminars and workshops, advisory services and outreach activities were delivered globally and 11 field projects were implemented. The projects resulted in sustainable mobility solutions, safe and inclusive public spaces with special emphasis on air and water quality, and improved sanitation, energy and solid waste management.

51. *Outcome 1.2 – Increased and secure access to land, and adequate and affordable housing:* UN-Habitat has continued to provide technical assistance for access to housing for all, especially in the neighbourhoods most affected by COVID-19. One technical product and over 13 seminars and workshops were delivered, along with advisory services and outreach activities and five field projects. The projects had an impact on integrated urban and territorial planning, development and implementation of effective planning laws, housing, slum upgrading, rehabilitation of brownfield sites and innovative financing through land readjustment.

52. *Outcome 1.3 – Effective settlement growth and regeneration:* UN-Habitat launched its “Inclusive, vibrant neighbourhoods and communities” flagship programme, employing urban regeneration as a tool for reducing spatial inequalities and poverty. Activities included the development of guiding principles for urban regeneration and socioeconomic recovery from COVID-19. One publication, three technical material products and nine seminars and workshops were

delivered, along with advisory services, outreach activities and six field projects. The projects had an impact on the development of national and local policies on urban heritage, historical landscape and culture and contributed to slum upgrading, rehabilitation of brownfield sites and urban riverine areas and urban recovery in the context of a prolonged crisis.

B. Domain of change 2: enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions

53. This domain of change supports cities and regions in becoming more prosperous through regional planning, rethinking of their comparative advantages and strategic repositioning within their territory to generate better economies of scale and agglomerate decent jobs and opportunities.

54. *Outcome 2.1 – Improved spatial connectivity and productivity of cities and regions:* UN-Habitat enriched national urban policy guidelines by mainstreaming the issues of migration, health, housing, smart cities, public space, transportation and urban-rural linkages. It also produced a sourcebook on integrating health in urban and territorial planning. Urban policy advice was provided to Member States and subnational authorities in 13 countries across three regions. Support was also provided for Member States to develop urban plans, including 30 municipal plans in Syria.

55. *Outcome 2.2 – Increased and equitably distributed locally generated revenues:* UN-Habitat focused on developing the “Rapid own-source revenue analysis” tool allowing cities to enhance and optimize revenue-generation. The tool was piloted in Kenya and Tanzania and will be implemented at scale through the “Sustainable Development Goal cities” flagship programme. UN-Habitat also supported Afghan municipalities in surveying 900,000 properties and increasing local revenue by the equivalent of \$30 million, with the impact now extended to 2.2 million properties through blockchain technology.

56. *Outcome 2.3 – Expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations for urban development:* UN-Habitat supported 10 cities in developing innovative solutions and smart cities programmes and launched the United Nations Innovation and Technology Centre in Hamburg, Germany. The centre will support smart cities strategies and challenge-driven innovation.

C. Domain of change 3: strengthened climate action and improved urban environment

57. This domain of change addresses climate action and resilience of cities through reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality; improved resource efficiency and protection of ecological assets; and effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change.

58. *Outcome 3.1 – Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality:* UN-Habitat developed guidelines on the urban dimension of nationally determined contributions to support their review under the Paris Agreement. UN-Habitat further supported the urban law module of the Law and Climate Change Toolkit, an online database developed by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commonwealth. Low-emission development strategies were further supported through guidelines on e-mobility. One publication, six technical material products and over 50 seminars and workshops were delivered, along with advisory services, outreach activities and six field projects. UN-Habitat supported the preparation of low-emission development strategies and sectoral interventions in over 50 cities. Training in climate action planning was provided for 329 local government officials from 60 cities in eight countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Rwanda, South Africa), resulting in eight low-emission development strategies.

59. *Outcome 3.2 – Improved resource efficiency and protection of ecological assets:* UN-Habitat focused on integrated waste management, emphasizing the circular economy approaches of the Waste Wise Cities campaign. UN-Habitat also addressed the land-based dimension of marine plastic litter. The public space programme and adaptation initiatives supported spatial approaches to nature-based solutions and ecosystems-based adaptation. Three field projects were implemented and six cities in the Philippines are developing marine plastic litter management strategies with UN-Habitat support.

60. *Outcome 3.3 – Effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change:* UN-Habitat initiated a range of normative activities, such as the “Resilient settlements for the urban poor” flagship programme, publishing “Climate change vulnerability and risk – A guide for community assessments, action planning and implementation”. Thirty-four seminars and workshops were delivered, along with advisory services and outreach activities, with an emphasis on COVID-19, climate resilience and climate finance. Fifteen field projects were implemented, with seven of these directly supporting local climate action plans focusing on resilience-building community

infrastructure. Other projects contributed to capacity development, urban and regional planning, climate resilient design, climate finance and climate-change policy.

D. Domain of change 4: effective urban crisis prevention and response

61. This domain of change addresses the work of UN-Habitat on crisis prevention and response. It builds on tools and approaches used in development and humanitarian settings and adapts them to urban crisis, migration or displacement settings. UN-Habitat experience, methodologies and tools help advance the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in coordination with humanitarian partners.

62. *Outcome 4.1 – Enhanced social integration and inclusive communities:* UN-Habitat supported Member States in their implementation of strategies and actions for increasing social integration and safety in public spaces through participatory and inclusive operational programmes in crisis-affected communities. The Programme’s cross-sectoral approaches, such as the “Peoples’ process”, a community development planning and implementation tool, supported projects in more than 15 countries. Projects such as “Supporting recovery and stability through local development in Iraq” were implemented in partnership, benefiting more than 700,000 people.

63. *Outcome 4.2 – Improved living standards and inclusion of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees through effective crisis response and recovery:* UN-Habitat has prioritized improved living standards and inclusion of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in urban life. The Programme provided expertise on the planning of camps and incorporated urban planning standards and tenure arrangements suitable for the transformation of camps into neighbourhoods, such as in northern Kenya, for 60,000 refugees. The “Inclusive cities – Enhancing the positive impact of urban migration” flagship programme provides a vehicle for the coordination and integration of normative approaches that support and enhance country-level programming. In Afghanistan, over 18,000 households (24 per cent female-headed) were registered and benefited from improved tenure security through formal land registrations.

64. *Outcome 4.3 – Enhanced resilience of the built environment and infrastructure:* Work towards this outcome focuses on implementing evidence-based local disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. UN-Habitat developed and improved urban profiling and urban-specific recovery frameworks, tools and approaches, supporting local implementation, mobilizing networks of urban stakeholders and complementing work led by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme at the national level. Urban profiles were developed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Syria, allowing for more focused reconstruction and recovery efforts. The City Resilience Global Programme, supporting mayors with data for decision-making, made significant progress by adapting in response to COVID-19.

E. Integrating digital tools and reinforcing innovation

65. For the first time, the UN-Habitat strategic plan has given a prominent role to innovation as a lever for sustainable urbanization. Structurally, a new unit has been established to support this work within UN-Habitat and with partners. In the first two years of implementation of the strategic plan, two global innovation labs were established (the Regent Park World Urban Pavilion in Toronto and the United Nations Innovation and Technology Centre in Hamburg) and others are being advanced (in Mexico and in Penang, Malaysia). UN-Habitat is also localizing the Secretary-General’s Road Map for Digital Cooperation, bringing expertise to key United Nations digital networks, including the High-level Committee on Programmes working group on artificial intelligence, the United Nations Innovation Network and the United Nations Network on Smart Cities.

66. New innovative tools and policy approaches are in place through the “People-centred smart cities” framework, which is connected to national urban policies in Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Nigeria and Rwanda. New digital tools are also being developed with various partners, including the Swedish HerCity platform promoting gender-responsive planning. Digital tools are adding value in support of tenure security in Nepal and the Philippines and mapping community infrastructure as part of the COVID-19 response in Kenya.

F. The World Urban Forum and the strategic plan

67. In the strategic plan, UN-Habitat recognizes its key role in influencing broader advocacy and action at all levels, by all types of stakeholders. Since its establishment in 2001, the World Urban Forum has become the main advocacy platform for urban transformation.

68. The tenth session of the World Urban Forum, held in Abu Dhabi in 2020, set a call to action, a call for commitments from all partners to implement the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action. In the period 2020–2021, UN-Habitat continued to mobilize engagement and track progress with the [Abu Dhabi Declared Actions](#) in the run-up to the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland, in 2022. In preparing for the session, UN-Habitat is working to create opportunities to amplify the voices of decision-makers, citizens, slum-dwellers, grass-roots women’s organizations, community groups and other partners working in urban development. The decision to align the themes of the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum and the World Cities Report presents an opportunity to strengthen policy coherence through research and dedicated thematic workstreams.

VIII. Resources to support implementation

69. The UN-Habitat resource mobilization strategy for the period 2020–2023 was approved by the Executive Board in October 2020. The strategy seeks to secure predictable, flexible and long-term funding to implement the activities of the strategic plan, with a five-prong approach to expanding and diversifying the resources available to fulfil the Programme’s mandate and objectives while also demonstrating strong value for investment.

70. With a significant shortfall in non-earmarked voluntary contributions, reaching only 26 per cent of the approved budget in the first year, UN-Habitat risks becoming largely project-based and donor-driven, potentially with important underfunding of subprogrammes. To ensure the Programme’s long-term sustainability as a multilateral organization, UN-Habitat is working to expand and diversify its sources of revenue. Based on the approved strategy, a newly created Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation has been registered in Jersey by Fiduchi Group and Blenheim Capital Partners for the benefit of the Programme. The foundation is to be endowed with third-party donations that will be invested using a capital preservation model structured in support of the Sustainable Development, providing returns to UN-Habitat on an annual basis. Sovereign wealth funds, private-sector donors and high-net-worth individuals have been identified as donors.

71. UN-Habitat is strictly the beneficiary of the endowment, and will not manage the foundation or its funds, with oversight provided by the Executive Board. The funds will be utilized to support the underfunded areas of the Programme’s mandate, including improving executive direction and management, legal, monitoring, evaluation, social inclusion and gaps in the subprogrammes, as determined by the Executive Director. All non-Member-State donors will be required to become participants of the United Nations Global Compact.

IX. Implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2022–2023

72. Initial implementation of the strategic plan shows that it enables more outcome- and impact-oriented programming, integrating UN-Habitat technical expertise and deepening work across the domains of change. It further creates opportunities to deliver impact against different outcomes across the domains of change. Importantly, it allows UN-Habitat to more clearly articulate the value it adds to United Nations system-wide efforts in areas such as climate action and sustaining peace, through the mobilization of the transformative potential of urbanization.

73. UN-Habitat now needs to go further in identifying corporate priorities when it comes to investment and new types of programmes that are scalable and catalytic to create global impact. Strengthening the analytical capacity and evidence base will be key. A stronger focus is needed to leverage the work of UN-Habitat, through strategic partnerships that support implementation and ensure knowledge generation, focused advocacy and outreach and by boosting the role of UN-Habitat in relation to its New Urban Agenda partners through its capacity-building strategy.

74. The strategic plan aims to establish UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence and innovation for sustainable urban development. In the first year of implementation, important steps were taken to advance the consolidation of the centre, including increasing focus on strategic areas where the Programme has clear comparative advantages. Such areas include data, knowledge and the setting of guidelines and norms for the main drivers of sustainable change: legislation, urban planning, governance and urban economy. UN-Habitat has also made significant progress in global monitoring using adapted technologies and partnering with the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, United Nations agencies and other key development partners. The production of cutting-edge knowledge is an integral part of the commitment to drive global policy discourse and debate.

75. Because of the preponderance of project-based funding, it has been difficult to ensure a balanced uptake of the five flagship programmes, creating gaps in the implementation of the strategic plan. The lack of flexible core funding has further impeded the full implementation of the enabling environment for the strategic plan, including the monitoring system, the impact communications strategy and the regional architecture.

76. Integration and cross-fertilization across the main drivers of change may give UN-Habitat a stronger footing within the United Nations system and the country-level support mechanisms as an integrator of United Nations interventions, with great potential value in the framework of United Nations reforms and the “Delivering as one” approach.

A. Cities, pandemics and the way ahead

77. One year on, COVID-19 continues to produce lessons on the shortcomings of many cities to protect their citizens, but it also points the way to a better, more sustainable urban future. Some of the most effective responses to the pandemic have been designed and led by cities, building on their ability to concentrate knowledge, resources and infrastructure. There are numerous examples of this from cities such as Barcelona, Bogota, Freetown, Johannesburg, Melbourne, Montreal and São Paulo. From enhanced service provision to the repurposing of the services, retail and other sectors to meet the changing needs of residents, urban areas have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation in the face of this crisis.

78. Moving from a mindset of emergency to recovery, cities can continue to focus on strengthening public health, economic resilience and service access for all. The longstanding divisions and inequalities highlighted by the pandemic mean that a return to the old normality is no longer enough: what is needed now is transformative change. With inclusive policies, community engagement and a meaningful transition to a more sustainable approach, cities could emerge from the COVID-19 crisis stronger and more resilient than before.

B. 2022 and the United Nations focus on urbanization

79. 2022 will be a seminal year for global debate on urbanization. In the first half of the year, the General Assembly will convene a high-level meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Member States will assess progress and recommend ways to align the implementation of the New Urban Agenda with the Decade of Action to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Most ambitiously, Member States will explore ways to engage local governments in intergovernmental and national planning processes and to articulate a vision for the future of cities.

80. The preparatory process for the high-level meeting will encompass actions by the Secretary-General, Member States and other constituencies of the New Urban Agenda. The Secretary-General will deliver a keynote address on the future of cities during Urban October 2021, issue the quadrennial report on the progress of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in January 2022 and present his report to the high-level meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in May 2022. In parallel, Member States in each region will review the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as part of the regional forums for sustainable development in March 2022. They will submit their recommendations to the General Assembly as input to the high-level meeting and to the Economic and Social Council as input to the 2022 high-level political forum. Member States will use this dual high-level meeting/high-level political forum preparatory process to strengthen the urban dimension of their voluntary national reviews, incorporating voluntary local reviews where possible. Business leaders, professional associations, grassroots organizations and academic institutions will also mobilize their constituencies in the period leading up to and during the high-level meeting.

81. The debate on urbanization will continue in 2022, at the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland, which is expected to attract 15,000 participants from more than 100 countries. Local governments, business leaders, grassroots organization, professional associations and academic institutions will hold constituent assemblies and panel dialogues at the session, including discussions on how to translate the outcome of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly into action.

82. The United Nations system will reinforce efforts by Member States and local and non-State actors to support accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda. This will involve the two-year review of the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development, endorsed by the Chief Executive Board in 2019. It will also include the United Nations task force on the future of cities, established by the Secretary-General in March 2021 to identify institutional

mechanisms for the United Nations to engage local governments in intergovernmental and national planning processes such as voluntary local reviews.

C. Aligning the strategic plan for 2020–2023 with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

83. In its resolution 75/233 of 30 December 2020, on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the General Assembly

calls upon the United Nations development system entities, while respecting their respective roles and mandates, to update and build upon their unique contributions and added value to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the preparation of their strategic plans and similar planning documents, and in this regard requests each individual entity to elaborate on how it plans to further engage in coherent and integrated support, with a stronger focus on actions, results, coherence, progress and impact in the field, as called for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under the guidance of and in close consultation with their respective governing bodies, taking into account, inter alia, lessons learned from their midterm reviews and the outcome of the present resolution.

84. In the resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the General Assembly urges the United Nations development system to address multiple issues but places emphasis on three of the four domains of change of the UN-Habitat strategic plan: poverty eradication; climate change, environmental sustainability and biodiversity; and the humanitarian/development nexus and disaster risk reduction. Thus, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review reaffirmed the continued relevance of the UN-Habitat strategic plan.

85. The COVID-19 pandemic and United Nations support for an inclusive and sustainable recovery is a recurring theme of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review resolution and, accordingly, will inform the remaining two years of implementation of the strategic plan. The Programme is well placed for this, given its COVID-19 policy and programme framework, its COVID-19 response plan, the Secretary-General's policy brief on COVID-19 in an urban world,¹¹ and *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future*. UN-Habitat should consider building on this work to establish a series of strategic policy papers, guiding programming on the role of cities and the new social contract, social protection, local government capacity development, urban design and fiscal space for cities.

86. In its resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the General Assembly urges the United Nations development system to continue to strengthen its work at the country level to assist countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. UN-Habitat has succeeded in developing an integrated catalogue of services, practices and tools; however, the Programme can move further to explain what it offers to programme countries and United Nations resident coordinators.

87. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is highlighted in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review resolution as an important instrument for promoting efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and country ownership. UN-Habitat will need to position urban policy and city planning strategically within United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks as a means for programme countries to achieve results areas (poverty, prosperity, climate and peace) or establish sustainable urban development as a dedicated results area.

88. In the quadrennial comprehensive policy review resolution, the General Assembly recognizes the challenges of United Nations entities in balancing core and non-core funding, and makes explicit recommendations on how donors, United Nations entities and countries can be incentivized to address this situation. UN-Habitat notes these recommendations as part of its resource mobilization strategy and will pursue greater joint programming to support core functions and attract non-core funding, as well as to assist countries in mobilizing financing for the Sustainable Development Goals.

D. Initiating global agenda reports in 2022

89. To strengthen monitoring and reporting, the Global Urban Monitoring Framework is being rolled out, and data from this process, together with reporting on progress in implementing the New Urban Agenda on the online [Urban Agenda Platform](#), will be used to guide the production of the 2022 quadrennial report on the progress of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the 2022

¹¹ <https://unhabitat.org/un-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-policy-brief-on-covid-19-in-an-urban-world>.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 Synthesis Report, voluntary national review reports and voluntary local reviews.

90. The Programme will also further expand and update the global urban indicators to provide urban risks and emergency monitoring data. This includes new additions and investments in real-time urban data processing platforms, big data analytics and artificial intelligence processors. More innovative partnerships will be explored with academia, the private sector and national systems to enhance this data sourcing and complement analysis. The New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals synthesis reports will also benefit from new city-level spatial data that will shed light on historical patterns of urban formation, spatial inequality and spatial access to basic services. UN-Habitat will continue to organize a series of topical webinars to share best practices on data production and access and lessons learned from regional commissions, countries and cities, international research and development organizations, academia and civil society.

E. Repositioning “urban” in the United Nations global agenda discourse and practice

91. The high-level meeting, the preparatory process leading up to it and the follow-up actions, beginning with the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, are encouraging developments. They create space for the international community to reposition “urban” in the global agenda discourse and practice. Harnessing the experience of cities in terms of the COVID-19 health impact and response and the emerging recovery will be important in this regard. Following closely on the Secretary-General’s policy brief on COVID-19 in an urban world, the publication *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* highlights the importance of urban design for public health and prosperity and the crucial contribution of cities in cooperation with national governments. It also notes growing popular support for public institutions and the role of the State. It reveals cities as the unit of climate action and tip of the spear of a new social contract, and the necessity of urban finance and local government capacity. Shifting the discourse will also involve reimagining multilateralism to include local governments, viewing cities as a driver of social inclusion, economic transformation and climate action and leveraging the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable development.

X. Preparations for the external midterm evaluation of the strategic plan

92. The strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 is accompanied by a midterm and a final evaluation. The midterm evaluation will be conducted in the first quarter of 2022 to assess the performance of UN-Habitat in terms of results achieved, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability, coherence and impact of work. The evaluation will also assess the integration of cross-cutting issues, including human rights, gender, youth and climate change.

93. The evaluation will further assess activities repurposed to address the impact of COVID-19 and, to the extent possible, the UN-Habitat COVID-19 response through the implementation of the strategic plan. It will guide corrective actions in the period remaining for the implementation of the strategic plan.

94. Similarly, a final evaluation will be carried out to focus on the outcomes and impact achieved, draw lessons learned and generate evidence to inform the planning cycle for the next multi-year strategic plan.

Annex

UN-Habitat strategic plan and theory of change, with results areas

