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Normative and operational activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, including reporting on the programmatic activities of the Programme in 2021 and the implementation of subprogrammes, flagship programmes and technical cooperation activities, and an update on the response of the Programme to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

Normative and operational activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, focusing on the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, guidance on housing rights and policy, and work on migration and displacement

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. Central to strengthening the impact of the work of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the aim of developing an iterative relationship between its normative and operational work. In that regard, knowledge-building programmes are used to inform and develop technical tools that, in turn, improve understanding of urban issues at the local, national and global levels.
2. The critical role of this normative-operational feedback cycle is apparent in the three initiatives showcased in the present report: (a) Sustainable Development Goal localization, including through voluntary local reviews and the Sustainable Development Goals Cities (SDG Cities) flagship programme, both of which illustrate how the implementation of the Goals has been improved thanks to better data and knowledge tools that help to accelerate development efforts at the local level; (b) UN-Habitat normative guidance and advocacy on housing policy and priorities, using the context of Europe as an example; and (c) the work being done globally on migration and displacement issues, which is guiding United Nations system-wide efforts on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and leveraging partnerships and integrated responses in crisis situations.
3. The above-mentioned initiatives provide an opportunity for the Executive Board of UN-Habitat to consider the Programme's strategy and activities against the priority needs arising from different situations and the geographic contexts of member States. The present report outlines the ways in which normative and operational activities are integrated into the work of UN-Habitat to improve quality of life, promote peace and encourage a greener and more just recovery from the coronavirus

* HSP/EB.2021/12.

disease (COVID-19) pandemic by harnessing the power of sustainable urban development to implement the New Urban Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals and voluntary local reviews

A. Background

4. UN-Habitat works to advance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level, in accordance with the commitments and principles set out in the New Urban Agenda. The support provided by UN-Habitat ensures that the innovative characteristics of the Sustainable Development Goals (universality, interconnectedness and indivisibility) are carried through to the local level.

5. The rapid, local adoption and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has become increasingly crucial. Many cities and local governments are developing innovative strategies, policies and initiatives to localize the Goals so as to achieve the 2030 Agenda, to avoid a reversal of the progress made since 2015 and to support an inclusive, resilient and sustainable post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. Cities are the epicentres of the pandemic, and local governments are at the forefront of managing the response to the crisis, including in terms of recovery.

6. The present report focuses on the strategy of UN-Habitat and on the progress made thus far to support the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals. That includes working through multilevel, integrated partnerships to connect all components of the implementation chain: on the normative side, from support on inclusive data collection to evidence-based policymaking and priority-setting; and, on the operational side, from project implementation support to robust monitoring and reporting systems.

B. Approach

7. The approach of UN-Habitat to the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals rests on three main pillars: the Global Urban Monitoring Framework, voluntary local reviews, and the SDG Cities flagship programme.

1. Global Urban Monitoring Framework

8. UN-Habitat is mandated by the General Assembly and the Statistical Commission to lead the development of a harmonized set of indicators to track progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda at the local level. The Global Urban Monitoring Framework harmonizes existing indices while incorporating rural-urban linkages and the principle of leaving no one behind. It is composed of a core set of global indicators and a series of secondary sets of indicators, to allow for the adaptation and analysis of each locality while aligning with local visions for cities. The Framework is a useful basis for the preparation of voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews, as well as common country assessments.

9. The Global Urban Monitoring Framework is at the heart of the UN-Habitat approach to data collection and indicator development for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, as well as for the voluntary local reviews and the SDG Cities flagship programme. The Framework will be digitized, through a partnership with the Global CEO Alliance, so as to allow cities to measure and compare their development performance. The digitization has been piloted through the SDG Cities flagship programme and will be rolled out worldwide once the Framework has been formally endorsed by the Statistical Commission, which is expected to occur during the first half of 2022.

10. The Global Urban Monitoring Framework is to be efficient (not to add to the burden on cities), effective (able to assist cities in tracking progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda and in providing information to encourage local action) and harmonized (with comparable data). The Framework can integrate additional sets of indicators that make it possible, for example, to understand the differences experienced at the district and subdistrict levels within cities.

2. Voluntary local reviews

11. The progress made through voluntary local reviews is a story of transformation from the bottom up, of local innovation and of increased global dialogue. Over the past year, the global movement of voluntary local reviews has grown exponentially, with 65 Reviews currently under way and some 20 municipalities and regional governments already working on their Reviews for 2021 and 2022. Voluntary local reviews have become a main tool for local and regional governments to monitor and report on progress towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, voluntary local reviews have proved to be powerful accelerators for the implementation of the Goals at the local level worldwide.

12. Voluntary local reviews can enhance innovative data applications, stakeholder inclusion and participation, policy coherence, strategic planning and multilevel governance. Interaction between the local and national levels is also strengthened by the interlinkages between voluntary local reviews and voluntary national reviews. UN-Habitat supports cities in developing voluntary local reviews with cutting-edge data and insights, as well as through peer learning opportunities, and has emerged as the global normative and knowledge leader in voluntary local reviews specifically and in the localization of Sustainable Development Goals more broadly.

3. SDG Cities flagship programme

13. The SDG Cities flagship programme helps cities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through a value chain that brings together urban data and evidence-based strategic planning, institutional capacity development and investment in impact. Each track is supported by online tools and resources and technical backstopping. The initiative thus strengthens local economic opportunities, improves environmental sustainability, reduces social inequalities and ultimately improves the quality of life of all residents. As such, SDG Cities is instrumental in the effective implementation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 and its four domains of change. Specifically:

(a) In the data track, the voluntary local reviews are used to bring together statistical, spatial and perception data, through the Global Urban Monitoring Framework, to monitor implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and identify priorities for action;

(b) The capacity development track includes diagnostic tools, such as the Sustainable Development Goals Project Assessment Tool, in the areas of governance, planning, service delivery and revenue, and directs cities to relevant training programmes and technical resources while improving the ability of major urban projects to contribute to the implementation of the Goals;

(c) The investment track includes a “city investment facility” that supports upstream project preparation, which in turn ensures alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and financial feasibility and matches pipeline projects to sources of public and private capital.

14. Through the SDG Cities flagship programme, UN-Habitat aims to have a positive impact on one million lives in some 1,000 cities through the adoption of an integrated, systematic approach that combines evidence-based policymaking, digitized tools and digital capacity support, technical backstopping and matchmaking finances with catalytic, impactful projects that promote the implementation of the Goals.

C. Workstreams

15. Work on localizing the Sustainable Development Goals is done through four workstreams: strategic partnerships; normative development and knowledge management; advocacy and capacity-building; and technical assistance.

1. Strategic partnerships

16. Operating with minimal resources over the past 12 months, UN-Habitat has focused its efforts on creating and consolidating strategic partnerships with key international, national and local stakeholders while positioning itself as the go-to partner on Sustainable Development Goal localization and voluntary local reviews. Key partners include the following:

(a) Local governments and their representative associations worldwide, which are key interlocutors as well as beneficiaries of the work of UN-Habitat. These include, for instance, United Cities and Local Governments, Local Governments for Sustainability, the Global Parliament of Mayors and other members of the Global Task Force Local and Regional Governments; Urban Agenda Platform; and various national associations of cities;

(b) National Governments with which UN-Habitat works to strengthen the Sustainable Development Goals localization approach and the interlinkages between voluntary local reviews and voluntary national reviews and to mobilize resources. These include, Finland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia and Spain;

(c) Entities of the United Nations system, which is critical to ensuring the coherence of United Nations support. Key United Nations actors are the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the regional commissions (the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme;

(d) Think tanks, non-profit organizations and academic entities, which support knowledge creation and provide expert advice. Examples include the University of Florence's ARCO Lab, Urbanice Malaysia, the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy and Engagement Global.

2. Normative development and knowledge management

17. UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments have developed the following key normative products to support local, regional and national governments in making progress on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level and in developing effective voluntary local reviews:

(a) *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews: Volume 1 – A Comparative Analysis of Existing VLRs*, which provides an analysis of all the documents that local governments have issued to review their performance in terms of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, looking for common traits, comparable variables and the common threads that bind voluntary local reviews;

(b) *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews: Volume 2 – Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Exploring the Local-National link*, which provides an analysis of the relationship between voluntary local reviews and voluntary national reviews, as well as of mechanisms for dialogue, collaboration and mutual learning. The volume also provides guidance to local and regional governments on how to affect higher levels of policymaking and catalyse broader subnational participation.

18. Other forthcoming research and normative guidance will focus on voluntary local reviews and megacities (with United Cities and Local Governments and Metropolis), voluntary local reviews and gender, and data in the context of voluntary local reviews.

3. Advocacy and capacity-building

19. UN-Habitat advocates and builds capacity in sustainable urban development by organizing international events and peer learning opportunities. These facilitate the exchange of ideas, allow knowledge resources to be shared and build on good practices, enhancing existing partnerships and creating new ones. A few highlights of the global advocacy and capacity development effort are presented below:

(a) An expert group meeting on the new generation of voluntary local reviews was held in February 2021 and organized, with the support of the City of Madrid, to focus on the question of multilevel governance and coordination.¹ Local and national governments from Finland, Japan and Spain jointly presented their efforts to coordinate action for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals through the voluntary review process. A discussion ensued with local governments from around the globe and representatives of the United Nations system. The meeting was an important building block in the development of the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews: Volume 2 – Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Exploring the Local-National link*;

(b) The first meeting of the Development Working Group of the Group of 20 (G20) was held on 24 and 25 February 2021 under the Presidency of Italy,² which has elevated the issues of sustainable infrastructure and cities, localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and medium-sized cities to the top of the G20 agenda. UN-Habitat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have been invited to support the discussions among G20

¹ See https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/07/communique_on_voluntary_local_reviews_final_edit.pdf.

² See <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2021/07/06/why-local-why-now-strengthening-intermediary-cities-to-achieve-the-sdgs>.

members in the framework of the Development Working Group and to act as co-hosts of a G20 platform on Sustainable Development Goals localization and intermediary cities. The engagement of UN-Habitat in the process has helped to strengthen the substantive proposals and to support the Presidency of Italy in focusing political attention on the topics of Sustainable Development Goal localization and intermediary cities, which are also mentioned in the communiqué issued on the occasion of the meeting of development ministers held on 29 June 2021 in Matera, Italy;

(c) UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments supported the “voluntary local review-voluntary subnational review days”³ held in July 2021 to provide local governments and other stakeholders with cutting-edge knowledge, a space for exchange and mutual learning for all governments and stakeholders engaged in advancing Sustainable Development Goals localization. Some of the events organized within that framework included the launch of the voluntary local review of Florence, Italy; a session on data and indicators in voluntary local review and voluntary subnational review processes; a session on social inclusion and participatory processes in voluntary local reviews and voluntary subnational reviews; a session on voluntary subnational reviews; and the launch of the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews: Volume 2 – Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Exploring the Local-National link*;

(d) UN-Habitat has supported local and regional governments through capacity-building and training opportunities, including through learning modules⁴ on: (a) an introduction to Sustainable Development Goal localization; (b) territorial planning to achieve the Goals; (c) reporting in the context of national and local reviews; (d) Goal localization through decentralized cooperation; and (e) beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19, in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments and Metropolis. The last of those was a unique learning exercise that gathered local and regional governments and partners from all over the world to discuss key topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It involved representatives of 94 cities and 50 countries who held discussions in 17 sessions, the outcomes of which were finally brought together in a unique knowledge hub online.

4. Technical assistance

20. In terms of technical assistance, UN-Habitat has achieved the following:

(a) Provided support to the cities of Niteroi and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Chimbote and Trujillo, Peru, in 2019;

(b) Provided support to Moscow and Florence, Italy, while discussions were initiated with Katowice, Poland, in 2020–2021;

(c) Initiated work in Amman, in partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, to develop the first voluntary local reviews for Arab countries. Forthcoming voluntary local reviews are being developed, with UN-Habitat support, for Madrid, Agadir, Morocco, and Bhopal, India;

(d) Partnered with the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s office in Malaysia, which has led to the inclusion of voluntary local reviews in the second voluntary national review of Malaysia.

D. Main normative and operational achievements

21. Since April 2020, the work done by UN-Habitat on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level and voluntary local reviews has evolved and accelerated, owing to a well-articulated process of co-creation and coordination between UN-Habitat branches, sections and units, and headquarters and UN-Habitat country and regional offices in the field. A Programme-wide corporate approach to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals has been adopted.

22. Externally, that has led to a consolidation of the UN-Habitat position vis-à-vis local, national and international partners as the agenda-setting international institution on voluntary local reviews. UN-Habitat is recognized as the main developer of cutting-edge knowledge and normative guidance on voluntary local reviews and the localization of Sustainable Development Goals. For example, United Nations regional commissions and Resident Coordinator offices have approached UN-Habitat to develop joint regional guidance and joint national approaches on voluntary local reviews respectively. UN-Habitat is also the United Nations entity that cities and regions go to for technical

³ See https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/07/report_vlr-vsr_days_hlpf_2021_1.pdf.

⁴ Published by: UN-Habitat, UNDP, United Cities and Local Governments, Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, Diputació Barcelona and Plataforma.

assistance on voluntary local reviews, as demonstrated by the growing demand for support to develop reviews.

Local2030

23. Local2030 is a project of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General that will transition by the end of 2021 into a broad-based coalition to advance the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in support of the decade of action for the Goals. The coalition will serve as a platform for the development of networks of local and regional governments and their associations, national Governments, businesses, community-based organizations and other local actors and the United Nations system. It will foster collaboration, incubate innovation and encourage the sharing of solutions and the implementation of strategies, leveraging rapid urbanization processes to accelerate the achievement of the Goals.

24. The coalition will create opportunities to work effectively with United Nations entities to make progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, the coalition will strengthen the capacity of United Nations entities to guide urbanization dynamics and local decision-making. It will support the efforts of United Nations country teams and Resident Coordinator offices to work with local actors in coordination with national Governments, leveraging United Nations assets. Finally, it will support the efforts of a wide range of local actors to monitor and report on the implementation of the Goals.

25. The Local2030 coalition secretariat will be hosted by UN-Habitat, which will also co-chair the coalition with another United Nations entity, on a rotational basis. For the first two years, the co-chairs are UN-Habitat and the United Nations Development Programme.

E. Way forward

26. By ensuring that the policies and commitments of the 2030 Agenda are implemented locally around the world, the Sustainable Development Goals localization strategy of UN-Habitat will remain grounded in the territorial approach. By refining and scaling up each of the core components of the strategy, UN-Habitat aims to achieve the following:

(a) To increase the knowledge and capacity of cities and municipalities to achieve the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) To scale up institutional integration and reinforce multilevel governance among local, national and regional governments through the establishment of supportive partnerships and improved data collection, collation and sharing, and improved understanding of mutually beneficial voluntary local and national reviews;

(c) To reduce spatial disparities and inequalities and address the lack of data by unifying the urban monitoring framework so as to identify the root causes of challenges and to collaboratively mitigate them with a view to leaving no one behind;

(d) To provide guidance to local and regional governments on localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, including through data collection, regular reporting, community participation, project development, financing, sharing and exchange of good practices and through innovative approaches such as the development of urban laboratories.

III. UN-Habitat engagement in housing policy issues and priorities, and examples from Europe

A. Background: housing in international law and United Nations policy

27. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵ and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁶ establish the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living.⁷

28. The right to adequate housing has been interpreted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No. 4 (1991), in which the Committee identified seven elements to the right to adequate housing: (a) legal security of tenure; (b) availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; (c) affordability; (d) habitability; (e) accessibility; (f) location; and (g) cultural adequacy.

29. In the 2030 Agenda, the right to adequate housing is prioritized through target 11.1, through which States have committed to ensure, by 2030, access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and to upgrade slums. UN-Habitat has been appointed as the custodian of target 11.1 and the associated indicators.⁸

30. In 2013, at its twenty-fourth session, the Governing Council of UN-Habitat requested UN-Habitat:

To pursue the expected outcomes of the Global Housing Strategy, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Environment Programme, by proposing a paradigm shift, where needed, including the integration of housing with other urban uses; encouraging the pro-poor performance of markets; promoting system-wide reforms to enable wider access to adequate housing solutions; strengthening linkages between housing, the economy, employment and poverty reduction; using sustainable building and neighbourhood designs and contributing to improving the living conditions of slum dwellers.⁹

31. The New Urban Agenda contains a number of references to the right to adequate housing, including in the context of States' commitment to:

Promoting national, subnational and local housing policies that support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for all as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, that address all forms of discrimination and violence and prevent arbitrary forced evictions and that focus on the needs of the homeless, persons in vulnerable situations, low-income groups and persons with disabilities, while enabling the participation and engagement of communities and relevant stakeholders in the planning and implementation of these policies.¹⁰

32. Through its strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, UN-Habitat aims to implement the mandates contained in the relevant treaties, the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the resolutions of governing bodies related to housing, principally through the domain of change on reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum. Furthermore, UN-Habitat is expected to provide policy advice and technical assistance for increased and secure access to land, and adequate and affordable housing.

⁵ Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

⁶ Article 11 (1) of the Covenant reads: "The States parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent."

⁷ See also www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/InternationalStandards.aspx.

⁸ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts/>.

⁹ Governing Council resolution 24/9, para. 1.

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex, para. 31.

33. The provision of adequate housing is also an important objective under the strategic plan outcomes on the effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change and on improved living standards and inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

34. In 2015, the States members of the Economic Commission for Europe adopted the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing,¹¹ which contributes to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals relevant to cities and human settlements and the implementation of the UN-Habitat global housing strategy framework.

B. Principal housing policy issues in the European region

35. According to data collected through the Eurobarometer, housing has become a matter of increasing concern for European citizens and the leading national issue in countries including Ireland, Luxembourg, Germany and Malta.¹²

36. While recent data on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the European Union¹³ showed positive trends in all indicators concerning Goal 11,¹⁴ certain groups were still disproportionately deprived of housing, a problem that magnified by the COVID-19 crisis. For example, while 17.1 per cent of the European Union population lived in an overcrowded household, the incidence of overcrowding was considerably higher for people with an income below the poverty threshold (29.1 per cent), migrants from non-European Union countries (36 per cent)¹⁵ and young people in the 15–29 age group (23.5 per cent)¹⁶. A survey in six countries found that 46 per cent of the Roma and travellers surveyed lived in overcrowded housing.¹⁷ Furthermore, around 1 in 10 interviewees reported that there was no access to tap water, showers or toilets inside their dwelling. The proportion was higher among those living in caravans or mobile homes.

37. According to recent data on the Sustainable Development Goals, nearly one in three low-income renters in OECD countries spend over 40 per cent of their income on housing.¹⁸ In the past two decades, housing prices within the OECD region have grown three times faster than incomes.¹⁹ The cost of housing has increased the most in large cities and particularly affected specific groups like young people, senior citizens and large families with children, who are pushed to live in overcrowded dwellings and poorly insulated homes, with unaffordable utility bills. Even before the pandemic, in some capital cities with particularly strained housing markets, the average rent for a two-room apartment represented more than 100 per cent of the median income of a person aged 18 to 24.²⁰

38. According to the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and the Abbé Pierre Foundation,²¹ if prevention policies specifically addressing the mass exclusion of young people are not rapidly introduced in the European region, the impact on homelessness could be significant.

39. The Economic Commission for Europe region has experienced an increased investment gap in social housing, estimated at €57 billion each year for the European Union. Governments are focusing on incentives to private developers, while housing support for low-income households is increasingly being given in the form of social welfare-type payments.²²

40. There is concern about the commodification of housing and the increasing dominance of financial markets in the housing sector. Recent research has confirmed “the assumption that housing

¹¹ E/ECE/1478/Rev.1.

¹² <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>.

¹³ Eurostat, *Sustainable Development in the European Union: Monitoring Report on Progress Towards the SDGs in an EU Context – 2021 Edition* (2021).

¹⁴ 1) people living in households with poor housing conditions, 2) people living in overcrowding.

¹⁵ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_housing.

¹⁶ See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database>.

¹⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Roma and Travellers in Six Countries* (2020).

¹⁸ OECD, *Brick by Brick: Building Better Housing Policies* (2021).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class* (2019).

²⁰ In Amsterdam, the average rent was €1,675 while the median income was €1,605; in Helsinki, the average rent was €1,398 while the median income was €1,363; and, in Lisbon, the average rent was €1,105 while the median income was €910.

²¹ *Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2021* (2021).

²² See www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/EMPL-PR-653984_EN.pdf.

financialization negatively impacts housing affordability”.²³ From a policymaker’s perspective, it has been noted that “policy plays an important role in the degree to which housing is, or can be, financialized”.²⁴

41. Currently, low- and middle-income households across the globe spend more of their income on housing costs than ever before, with a large share of those housing costs being reflected in utility costs. For example, in 2019, 6.9 per cent of the overall European Union population were unable to keep their homes adequately warm, while, among people affected by income poverty, the rate was 18.2 per cent.²⁵

42. To address this challenge, in October 2020 the European Union launched the Renovation Wave Strategy and Action Plan to refurbish and improve the building stock. At the same time, it is crucial to implement innovative solutions to improve the climate and energy performance of homes in a way that does not put an unsustainable financial burden on the most vulnerable.

C. Policy priorities

43. The dominant housing policy priority in the Economic Commission for Europe region is related to the ongoing affordability crisis, exacerbated since 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Underlying drivers include wage stagnation and rising levels of unemployment and poverty, accompanied by increases in housing prices and proportional declines in the availability of social housing.

44. Reforming housing systems requires an understanding of the drivers of unaffordability and exclusion, which may vary widely. Data collection for evidence-based and coordinated policies should be strengthened, as policy tools need to be designed and adapted to address local conditions and often quite complex causal processes. Policy coordination among countries, but also among different levels of governments and among other stakeholders, is essential.

45. Governments need the right policy tools but also the capacity to implement them effectively and to evaluate and adapt them. This requires legislative authority and political support, as well as financial resources, administrative expertise and stakeholder commitment to achieve the agreed targets.

46. Policy reforms are needed to respond to trends such as the ageing of the population, the spread of online platforms for short-term rentals, changes in preferences and behaviours following the shift to remote working, the reduction in the carbon footprint of construction, improvements in the energy efficiency of the existing building stock, the commodification of housing and reductions in public investments.

47. The right to adequate housing should not be regarded as a one-dimensional concept. Rather, housing rights involve multiple dimensions relating to, inter alia, security of tenure, adequacy of housing, equality before the law and non-discrimination. Housing cannot be thought of as merely having four walls and a roof, but involves an intricate consideration of adequacy, health, security and the law. The right to adequate housing should be consistently and systematically addressed in the reports submitted by the States members of the Economic Commission for Europe in the framework of the universal periodic review.

D. Policy advice and technical assistance provided by UN-Habitat

48. UN-Habitat jointly coordinates, with the Economic Commission for Europe and the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing (Housing Europe), the Housing2030 initiative to promote affordable housing in Europe.²⁶ Housing2030 brings together housing experts from over 56 countries and some 43,000 providers of affordable housing and neighbourhood developers. In the framework of the initiative, a normative toolkit for policymakers has been developed highlighting good practices on land management, environmental sustainability, housing financing and governance with a view to promoting housing affordability. The preparatory work done for the toolkit has

²³ European Commission Joint Research Centre, *Who Owns the City? Exploratory Research Activity on the Financialization of Housing in EU Cities* (2020), pp. 6 and 83.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12 and 84.

²⁵ Eurostat, *Sustainable Development in the European Union*, p. 63.

²⁶ See www.housing2030.org/.

influenced the action plan for the Economic Commission for Europe region on promoting sustainable housing as part of the recovery and rebuilding plans after the COVID-19 pandemic.

49. During 2020 and 2021, UN-Habitat has been called upon by different housing stakeholders, including IKEA, the European Investment Bank and the entity dealing with the lease management of municipal housing in Lisbon,²⁷ to contribute to their strategies on how to foster sustainable and affordable housing in the context of evolving challenges and priorities.

50. UN-Habitat, in partnership with the Economic Commission for Europe, is delivering technical assistance to the Government of Bulgaria in the formulation and implementation of evidence-based and participatory housing policies addressing agreed national priorities.²⁸ This technical assistance is financed through the United Nations Development Account programme and follows a previous pilot project on the development of evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development that was implemented in four countries: Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

51. UN-Habitat is providing technical support for the preparation of the first international forum of the International Union of Architects on removing barriers to affordable housing, to be held in Madrid in May 2022.

52. The normative work carried out by UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, has also contributed to the establishment of a clear link between affordable housing and the prevention of homelessness. In the first United Nations resolution on homelessness, the Economic and Social Council recognized that homelessness was a complex issue that required a multisectoral approach and integrated responses, and that it constituted a violation of human dignity and may be an obstacle to the fulfilment of all human rights.²⁹ Furthermore, the Council encouraged national and local governments to improve access to affordable housing through integrated housing policies and social protection measures, and called upon Member States to collect disaggregated data on demographics related to homelessness and to harmonize the measurement and collection of data on homelessness to enable national and global policymaking.³⁰

53. In response to that resolution, in January 2021 the European Parliament called upon the European Union and its member States to end homelessness in the European Union by 2030 and to set that as a goal at the European Union level.³¹

E. Way forward

54. The experience gained by UN-Habitat and the analysis it has carried out of the persisting challenges in the Economic Commission for Europe region have highlighted the need to establish a clearer mechanism for coordinating the efforts of all housing stakeholders and, specifically, for bridging gaps in knowledge, strengthening capacities and testing innovative approaches on the ground. UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe, is currently developing a platform with the aim of strengthening the capacity of European stakeholders in the housing sector.

55. To ensure effective monitoring and accountability systems, UN-Habitat is promoting improved reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals and indicators relating to land and housing and also promoting the systematic inclusion of land- and housing-related rights in the universal periodic review process for Economic Commission for Europe member States.

56. The future of housing policies and investments in the region calls for a prioritization of the following objectives:

(a) To eliminate homelessness in the shortest possible time. A first step would be to align the definitions and measurements used by the European Union and by the global homelessness data initiative launched by UN-Habitat in partnership with the Institute of Global Homelessness;³²

²⁷ See <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/entidades/gebais-gestao-dos-bairros-municipais-de-lisboa-e-e.m>.

²⁸ Namely, outdated and unsupported housing stock needing system repair and renovation; high-energy consumption of the existing stock; lack of social housing that secures access to homes for people with disabilities; lack of financial mechanisms for people with low incomes; and issues regarding young people's living needs in Bulgaria.

²⁹ Resolution 2020/7, paras. 4 and 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 12 and 16.

³¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24120&langId=en>.

³² The initiative aims to bring together United Nations entities (such as the International Labour Organization, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Statistical Commission), civil society organizations (such as

(b) To expand and improve data on housing rights and affordability. As the global indicator for target 11.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals – “Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing” – is not fully able to capture data on all dimensions of the adequacy of housing and basic services, it is recommended that data on the housing cost overburden rate be included in voluntary national reports on the implementation of target 11.1;

(c) To address discrimination and ensure equality. Tackling inequality requires targeted support to vulnerable people, particularly women, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. Linking housing policies with poverty and inequality strategies and social security measures through international cooperation, which UN-Habitat is well positioned to facilitate, is critical to ending the further marginalization of certain groups as a result of policies;

(d) To prevent forced evictions. UN-Habitat notes that the member States of the Economic Commission for Europe are responsible for prohibiting forced evictions and ensuring that evictions are carried out in line with international standards, their obligations under international human rights law and their commitments under related instruments, such as the Council of Europe revised European Social Charter and the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing;

(e) To address the financialization of housing. In the 2020 Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing, the current global housing crisis is linked to growing socioeconomic inequality, large-scale financialization of housing and land and unsustainable housing systems.³³ Future investments in housing policies must continue to question the treatment of housing as a commodity;

(f) To address the effects of climate change on the right to housing, which is an emerging priority for UN-Habitat.

IV. Work on migration and displacement, including the flagship programme “Inclusive cities: enhancing the positive impact of urban migration” and field operations

A. Background

57. Today, one in every seven people on the planet is a migrant.³⁴ The world is witnessing a growing trend of irregular migration. Forced displacement, which is mainly triggered by conflict and violence, as well as climate change and natural disasters, is on the rise. Migration and urbanization are often interlinked processes. As increasing numbers of people move to cities in search of a better of life and job prospects, migration will remain one of the key driving forces of urbanization.

58. The mandate of UN-Habitat focuses on sustainable urbanization, including in fragile settings and countries affected by crisis, and the Programme has long-standing operational work in those settings, in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Somalia. That brings a concrete added value to collective results being pursued by the broader United Nations system within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

59. In its strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, UN-Habitat has, for the first time, made it explicit that it aims to advance sustainable urbanization as a driver of development and peace, to improve living conditions for all. Moreover, one of its domains of change is “effective urban crisis prevention and response”.

60. Since June 2021, UN-Habitat has been recognized as an adherent to the recommendation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus prepared by the OECD Development Assistance Committee,³⁵ as an acknowledgement of its proven commitment to the principles embedded in it. UN-Habitat has been making consistent efforts to implement the recommendation through its work on land and conflict and by managing urban displacement and migration and supporting sustainable recovery and reconstruction in complex emergencies and following natural disasters.

FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation) and international organizations (such as the OECD) to develop standardized global homelessness indicators and data collection methodologies that will allow for the enumeration of the global homeless population.

³³ A/HRC/43/43.

³⁴ World Economic Forum, *Migration and Its Impact on Cities* (October 2017), p. 14.

³⁵ See <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>.

61. The present section highlights the progress being made in the above-mentioned areas of work and outlines the ways in which UN-Habitat can, by leveraging its normative and operational synergies, contribute effectively to United Nations system-wide efforts related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It also highlights how the strengthened normative and operational support provided by UN-Habitat can help to build strong strategic partnerships and achieve success in crisis situations by engaging more effectively in knowledge management, policy and advocacy work within global and regional networks, for example on durable solutions to forced displacement through the Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for Internally Displaced People, the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development of the World Bank Group, the United Nations Network on Migration, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Global Protection Cluster, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, the Mayors Migration Council and the issue-based coalition in the Asia-Pacific region on people, mobility and urbanization.

B. Strengthening the normative framework and tools

62. The inclusion in the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 of the domain of change on effective urban crisis prevention and response allows for the development of a more tailored normative framework and for more tailored tools, as a complement to the vast operational experience of UN-Habitat in that area. In turn, that approach strengthens the constructive feedback loop between the knowledge-producing and the operational and technical advisory elements of UN-Habitat.

63. Normative guidance on integrated urban planning in protracted crisis contexts, on forced eviction prevention and eviction impact assessments and on durable solutions for internally displaced populations and vulnerable communities in cities have already been incorporated into the UN-Habitat catalogue of services. The existing implementation tools are being further refined on the basis of lessons learned from operational experiences.

1. Urban recovery frameworks

64. One key area where the normative toolbox is being strengthened is in relation to the urban recovery frameworks, which build on work done in Iraq, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The urban recovery framework for conflict-affected countries is an institutional and policy framework, with related programming, that is designed to support resilient urban recovery at scale and to facilitate the renewal of the social contract for peace. The approach was developed by UN-Habitat in response to the significant gap in the ability of the international system to address the specific consequences of conflict in urban environments and to help to implement the analysis provided through urban profiling tools. The approach is key to accelerating the delivery of collective outcomes that transcend the traditional humanitarian-development-peace nexus and complements the national recovery frameworks already jointly developed by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations, which focus on implementation of post-disaster and post-conflict needs assessments.

65. The approach encapsulated in the urban recovery frameworks currently has five broad aims: (a) to strengthen institutions so that they can guide urban recovery at scale; (b) to develop multisectoral programming and financing methods that can be scaled up; (c) to mainstream resilience in all interventions (in line with the goal of building back better); (d) to address the root causes of conflict and improve urban governance; and (e) to facilitate a transition from a purely humanitarian response to one that also includes recovery and sustainable urbanization, as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

66. The UN-Habitat regional office for Arab States is further developing the urban recovery framework approach through its support for a consortium established in response to the explosions in Beirut in the summer of 2020. Alongside that, the regional office is applying the data and knowledge collected for the urban profiles of eight Yemeni cities in programme design. Currently, UN-Habitat is also applying the experience with urban recovery frameworks in the development of a global programme that complements the approaches used in the World Bank-European Union-United Nations collaboration.

2. High-level Panel on Internal Displacement

67. Building on UN-Habitat's experience in managing urban displacement, the Programme has supported the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, established by the Secretary-General, focusing in particular on the urban and local dimensions of internal displacement. UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the International Institute for Environment and Development and the Joint Internally Displaced Person Profiling Service, prepared a submission to the Panel and facilitated a series of consultations between Panel members and local authorities affected by displacement in

Burkina Faso, Colombia, Honduras, Iraq, Somalia and Ukraine. Findings were discussed at a virtual global round table on 19 April 2021 and captured in a report entitled “Internal displacement in an increasingly urbanized world”.³⁶

68. The key findings from the series of consultations to the Panel can be summarized as follows:

- (a) International actors need new ways of thinking about the municipal-level dynamics of urban internal displacement;
- (b) Tailored capacity-building and technical assistance for municipal authorities should be mainstreamed into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming;
- (c) International financing modalities need to adapt to the complicated and fluid contexts of urban displacement crises, not the other way around;
- (d) Financial support to local government is key to expanding access to basic services and infrastructure, in line with population growth, either in the form of scaled up fiscal transfers from national Governments or direct grants.

C. Scaling programmes in priority subregions and countries

69. UN-Habitat continues to focus programme development efforts on subregions and countries where it can bring significant added value to United Nations system-wide efforts. For example, UN-Habitat has contributed to the United Nations response to the refugee crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and Turkey, and the displacement crisis in the Sahel. The present section outlines the value of the UN-Habitat operational strategies in Burkina Faso and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

1. Operational support to the refugee crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

70. As a result of a protracted political and economic crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 5.6 million people have fled the country since 2015, with 4.6 million of them moving to cities in neighbouring countries, generating a humanitarian crisis of regional proportions. The most vulnerable among them tend to settle in urban peripheries that cannot provide adequate housing, infrastructure or basic services. Looking for affordability and informality in their urban environment, which is conducive to their survival, the most vulnerable migrants end up undermining their ability to gain access to rights, services and opportunities in their new city.

71. The Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity project brings together the unique knowledge and experience of UN-Habitat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in an effort to reduce the vulnerability of refugees, migrants and host communities and to promote their socioeconomic and territorial integration in urban areas.³⁷

72. Based on the assumption that migration can contribute significantly to a city’s prosperity, the Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity project seeks to achieve effective integration through a medium-to-long-term perspective that focuses on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Such an approach targets both the socioeconomic and spatial determinants of inclusion. Human mobility profiles and clear recommendations are developed to inform evidence-based urban policies and plans that incorporate issues linked to the integration of refugees and other migrants. Each profile is complemented by an urban inclusion marker, a composite index measuring the degree to which the host city is inclusive on the basis of five dimensions: (a) housing, infrastructure and services; (b) employment and economic opportunities; (c) health and well-being; (d) education, diversity and culture; and (e) public space, safety and urban vibrancy. The marker generates digital maps that help to visualize spatial concentrations of deficits regarding inclusion, allowing for a more granular territorial response.

73. Such assessments guide the formulation of territorial intervention plans at the neighbourhood level. Those include: (a) a “physical base plan” proposal to guide interventions that improve living conditions and favour integration in line with city plans; and (b) a portfolio of city-wide actions co-developed with the community, in accordance with the needs and aspirations of local residents and

³⁶ See www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/synthesis_report_urbaninternaldisplacement.pdf.

³⁷ See <https://ciudadesincluyentes.org/> (in Spanish only).

taking into consideration the different levels of access to rights, services and opportunities by refugees and other migrants, as well as other vulnerable groups.

74. The Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity project focuses on both strengthening the capacities of public institutions and private and community actors and enhancing interinstitutional mechanisms and multilevel coordination in the design, implementation and evaluation of integration policies, thus promoting accountability and transparency. By adopting participatory and place-based methodologies, the project encourages civic engagement, intercultural dialogue and inclusive urban governance as formidable platforms for fighting xenophobia and promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

2. Operational support to the internal displacement crisis in Burkina Faso

75. Burkina Faso is facing a large-scale internal displacement crisis, with more than 1.3 million people displaced as at July 2021. As the security situation has deteriorated, with frequent attacks and incidents in the northern regions of the country, many internally displaced persons have been seeking refuge in urban areas. This has resulted in small and medium-sized cities seeing their populations double or even triple, and has led to a huge increase in the number of people exposed to unplanned and inadequate living conditions, with limited or no access to services ranging from water and electricity to schools and health. As competition for housing, land and services increases, social cohesion between the host communities and internally displaced persons is under threat.

76. UN-Habitat is currently implementing a project involving four cities in Burkina Faso, financed by the European Union, which will help local authorities to find durable solutions for internally displaced persons in urban areas. While the current security crisis has accelerated urbanization in Burkina Faso, global data shows that many internally displaced persons will not return to their areas of origin.

77. In protracted situations like that in Burkina Faso, durable solutions must have a strong focus on the social and economic inclusion of internally displaced persons in the urban areas to which they have fled. While humanitarian aid is urgently needed to meet the need for shelter, water and food, development approaches must ensure that the rapid rise in the urban population does not lead to increased inequality and long-term vulnerability. The UN-Habitat project currently being implemented in Kaya, Dori, Kongoussi and Tougouri places a strong focus on enhancing the capacity of local actors, as not only are they the first providers of an emergency response, they also need to ensure the provision of services and an adequate living environment for growing populations and foster social cohesion between host communities and internally displaced persons to reduce the risk of protracted conflict.

78. The first step taken in the context of the project was to establish local decision-making bodies known as “municipal cells of urban resilience” that are headed by mayors, local representatives of different government services (including social services, education, health, water and electricity) and representatives of host communities and internally displaced persons, as well as humanitarian actors for improved coordination.

79. After jointly collecting data on existing services, project participants undertook capacity-building on inclusive and integrated urban planning processes for increased resilience in urban areas. New neighbourhood planning activities aimed at providing for those in vulnerable situations and based on the context-specific needs of the different cities, placed the municipal cells at the centre of the decision-making process. Pilot activities in the four cities will result in the building of 500 new homes, the expansion of schools and health facilities and increased access to water and sanitation, serving both host communities and internally displaced persons. Additional capacity-building for local actors and communities will increase knowledge on reducing the environmental impact of rapid urban growth, as well as providing initial incentives for the economic inclusion of internally displaced persons.

80. UN-Habitat places great importance on the involvement of beneficiaries and local actors in all phases of developing durable solutions. First, cross-sectoral, spatial data collection is undertaken to understand the risks of tensions arising between community groups and to understand inequalities in cities; second, there is a joint discussion and a setting of priorities, which results in integrated solutions covering different human rights, including the rights to adequate housing and education, and the creation of enabling environments for economic opportunities. In a context such as that in Burkina Faso, where the overall urbanization rate is still low, the consideration of strategies to enable sustainable urban development early in crisis response is crucial.

D. Way forward

81. The flagship programme “Inclusive cities: enhancing the positive impact of urban migration”, further integrates the operational and normative work of UN-Habitat. It is being developed as a global programme to scale up the work on migration and displacement and increase its impact. That involves a dual focus on durable solutions for migrants, refugees and internally displaced people by maximizing the positive contribution that they can make to urban development and by ensuring social cohesion with host communities while addressing their specific vulnerabilities and protection needs.

82. As a global programme, it will achieve the following:

- (a) Address knowledge and data gaps on migration and displacement (trends and drivers) and their impact on urbanization patterns and cities;
- (b) Strengthen the normative framework and tools of UN-Habitat to provide guidance to countries in managing urban migration;
- (c) Scale up programme development in priority subregions and countries most affected by urban migration and mobilize broad-based partnerships;
- (d) Ensure a stronger engagement in global and regional mechanisms aimed at the implementation of the global compact on refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

83. In order to scale up its strategy, UN-Habitat envisages adopting an approach that focuses on the following four tracks:

- (a) The data and research track, to build strategic partnerships for the identification of knowledge and data gaps to which UN-Habitat could contribute to filling; for example, by mainstreaming urban migration in the recently established Global Urban Monitoring Framework;
- (b) The normative track, to build normative capacity and contribute to the efforts led by UNHCR, IOM and others;
- (c) The programme development support track, to build deployable programme development capacity to drive and support regional, country and multi-country activities on migration and displacement and to provide technical advisory and advocacy services;
- (d) The networking and partnership track, to invest in strengthening and expanding partnerships on urban migration and displacement through national, regional and global dialogue platforms, in addition to establishing partnerships within the United Nations system and with cities and civil society organizations.

V. Conclusion

84. The cases in the present report highlight some of the strengths of the UN-Habitat strategy, which systematically applies new normative and technical knowledge to addressing both long-term and more immediate development challenges faced by Member States. It also feeds into the shared knowledge, innovations and good practices of the global development community.

85. The cases show that the UN-Habitat approach leverages the universal rights-based goals for long-term normative development work. In so doing, UN-Habitat develops cutting-edge tools and draws lessons from which to expand on-the-ground project implementation in an array of development contexts, working with governments, communities and other core partners. Guided by its strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, in particular the domains of change, such increasingly thematically integrated and multi-partner approaches allow UN-Habitat to keep its finger on the pulse of changing urbanization opportunities and sustainability challenges.