UN-HABITAT SPAIN

Implementing the New Urban Agenda in Spain:

Together in Action

March 2022
UN-Habitat was formally installed in Spain in 2012, after the approval in November 2011 of the related Headquarters Agreement. Its presence in Spain is made up of the country office, hosted by the current Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA) in Madrid, and the City Resilience Global Programme (CRGP) in Barcelona. Until the beginning of 2021, Barcelona also housed the office of the Global Water Operators’ Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA), which received support from the Spanish government from 2012 to 2018.

The UNH COS is fully aligned with UNH’s Strategic Plan 2020-2023 and contributes to the mission of promoting transformative change in cities and human settlements for implementing the urban dimension of SDGs and the New Urban Agenda to leave no one and no place behind, by fostering two tiers actions:

1) In-country activities for the implementation of NUA. National government and some sub-national and local governments have been supported in the definition of urban agendas, strategies, and policies, to strengthen the implementation of sustainable urban development through policy advice, capacity building, technical support and fostering knowledge.

2) Support to UNHs normative work through collaboration with Spanish partners, providing support to global guidelines, knowledge and instruments as well as applying global norms through country-level initiatives, predominantly in the Spanish speaking world.

Since its opening in 2012, the UNHCOS has linked these normative and operational activities to achieve higher impact and transformational change; forging innovative partnerships at all levels, thus promoting a genuine territorial approach for localizing urban dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implementing the New Urban Agenda (NUA) at country-level, while, at the same time, fostering Spanish partners’ commitment with UNH’s global work that has facilitated the development of strategic normative work.

Urban challenges also take place in already “urbanized” contexts with high levels of urban population, medium-high levels of income/development and decentralized competencies (such as Spain, where 81% of the population already lives in urban areas). The 2030 Agenda and NUA’s universal scopes address this reality and promote a commitment for their implementation also in these countries, cities and communities.

This implies 3 categories of normative work: a) the development of norms and standards; b) the support to governments and others to integrate the norms and standards into legislation, policies and development plans; and c) the support to governments and others to implement legislation, policies and development plans based on the international norms, standards and conventions level (UNEG Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work in the UN System 2014).

---

1 UNEG defines normative work as the support to the development of norms and standards in conventions, declarations, regulatory frameworks, agreements, guidelines, codes of practice and other standard setting instruments, at global, regional and national level. Normative work also includes the support to the implementation of these instruments at the policy level, i.e. their integration into legislation, policies and development plans, and to their implementation at the programme level.
**In country activities**
- Policy Advice, Capacity Building and Technical Support
  - Spanish Urban Agenda
  - National Urban Forum
  - 5 Subnational Urban Agendas
  - 150 Cities and towns implementing the NUA

**Support to normative work**
- Fostering Effective Knowledge
  - National Urban Policies
  - Subnational Urban Policies
  - Localization of SDGs
    - Voluntary Local Reviews
    - Voluntary Subnational Reviews
    - Global Urban Monitoring Framework
    - SDGs in cities

**New Urban Agenda implementation**

**National Urban Policies**
- Spanish Urban Agenda
  - UN-Habitat Spain has been permanently involved as part of the advisory committee
  - Support and active participation in advisory meetings for its elaboration and approval

**Subnational Urban Policies**
- Basque Country (2019)
- Andalusia (2018)
- Catalonia (2022)
- Extremadura (in process)
- Valencia (in process)
- UN-Habitat Spain also supported:
  - Expert Group Meeting on National Urban Policies, Towards effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda at national level from the Subnational Level
  - EGM “Towards Effective Implementation of the New Urban Agenda: Discussions from the Subnational Level”

**Local implementation**
- UN-Habitat Spain has supported the development of SDG strategies and Voluntary Local Reviews, as in the case of Madrid

**Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Key figures**
- 2012: Year installed
- 100%: Self-project funded
- $27,697,528: Mobilized funds
- 18: Memorandums of Understanding
- 50: Collaboration Agreements

**Other themes**
- Urban safety
- Ageing and Inclusion
- Green and sustainable mobility
- Accessible and inclusive housing
- Urban regeneration
- Metropolitan development
- Urban-rural linkages

**Voluntary Local Reviews**
- Supported the elaboration of the “Guide to the Preparation of Voluntary Local Reviews”
- Supported the elaboration of Voluntary Local Reviews, such as the one of Madrid
- EGM “Towards a new generation of VLRS: Connecting VLRS and VNRMs Voluntary National Reports”

**Global Urban Monitoring Framework (GUMF)**
- Support in the elaboration of the GUMF
- Piloting the GUMF in the city of Madrid, taking into consideration the Global Declaration of Cities methodology
- Aligning the monitoring of Basque Urban Agenda implementation with the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (GUMF), in the first case, where the GUMF is piloted at regional level
- EGM “Designing a UN System wide urban monitoring framework for measuring SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda”

**SDGs in Cities**
- Supported the development of SDG strategies, such as in Madrid
A STRATEGIC PARTNER

Initially the UNHCOS aimed at acting as liaison for institutional representation and the establishment of partnerships with the Spanish Government, subnational and local governments, and other stakeholders committed to the mission of UN-Habitat, as well as adding value to the agency’s mandate in strategic areas of collaboration.

However, since its creation, it was clear the potential of strategic collaborations with Spanish partners beyond donor treatment, which led to the evolution of the relationship to strategic partners.

The value of these relationships became even more important at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), where the United Nations Member States adopted the New Urban Agenda, and the importance of UN-Habitat was explicitly recognized as a focal point, within the United Nations System, in the implementation, follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda.

Furthermore, in 2015, under the auspices of the United Nations, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes, among others, Sustainable Development Goal 11 “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. It not only recognizes the magnitude of the phenomenon of urbanization and the fact that more than 50% of the world’s population now lives in urban areas, but also the key role of cities in the global economy, the agenda of climate change, the use and consumption of natural resources, as well as their contribution to social advancement and innovations in all areas.

STRATEGIC AREAS

1) In-Country Activities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda
   - Regional Level
   - National Level
   - Subnational Level
   - Local level

2) Support to UN-Habitat’s Normative Work through collaboration with Spanish Partners
   - Fostering Effective Knowledge

3) Strategic Alliances and Resource Mobilization

4) Effective Advocacy, Outreach and Communications
   - Advocacy & Promotional Activities of urban SDGs and NUA
   - Support to UN-Habitat advocacy platforms
1) In-Country Activities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda

POLICY ADVICE, CAPACITY BUILDING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

The UNHCOS supports and provides technical support to the national, subnational and local governments in their processes of definition and implementation of urban policies and strategies in accordance with the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 11.

At National Level it has supported the development of the Spanish Urban Agenda (2019), the National Urban Forum (2021), and the elaboration of national urban policies as lever strategies of Spain's 2030 plan, among others.

At Subnational Level, the UNHCOS has supported the development of the Regional Urban Agendas of Basque Country (2019), Andalusia (2018), Catalonia (in process), Extremadura (in process), Valencia (in process), etc.

And at Local Level has supported cities in developing local urban agendas, localizing development plans, VLRs, etc.

The UNHCOS transfers knowledge, competences, methods and abilities to strengthen the capacity of all tiers of government to plan, manage, execute and monitor policies, programs and projects. Fostering capacity development is the means to inform UNH’s normative work, assess and respond to the needs of governments and stakeholders, and drive innovations and support long-term institutional transformation at all levels. It comprises a set of innovative activities and approaches that empower and enable individuals and organizations to understand, analyze, and implement solutions to the enormous urban challenges facing cities and urbanization. It is also a facilitator of policy implementation, organizational and institutional change, and transformative action on the ground.

Capacities are built through direct support for the definition of policies at various levels of government, and through the development of technical workshops for key actors involved in the city. The UNHCOS supports and participates in the phases of discussion and definition of urban policies and strategies, promoting two important elements:

- To facilitate the inclusion of proposals related to sustainable urban solutions, providing evidence of their effectiveness and convenience;
- To indirectly reinforce the capacities of the technicians and other actors involved in the development of this type of proposal, increasing their capacity to argue, defend and reconcile approaches during the implementation phase of defined policies and strategies.

The UNHCOS has participated in several steering committees providing advice to follow up on the development of urban agendas. It has been part of the consultations for the development of the Spanish Urban Agenda, finally approved in 2019, which is a catalyst policy within the Government’s Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda.

It has also participated directly in the process of developing three regional agendas: the
Urban Agenda of the Basque Country, approved in October 2019, the Urban Agenda of Catalonia and Valencia, which are being defined. Previously, in 2018, the UNHCOS also participated in various debates for the definition of the Urban Agenda for Andalusia and has been involved in the process that is being carried out in Extremadura. At the local level, UN-Habitat is directly involved in the development of urban strategies and action plans such as the A Coruña Urban Agenda and the Madrid 2030 Strategic Plan.

Furthermore, the UNHCOS also facilitates urban governance by promoting dialogue and coordination between different actors, especially focused on the definition and implementation of proposed urban policies and strategies at various levels of government. To do this, it promotes participation and dialogue between different levels of government and different sectors within the public administration itself, and with different urban actors, including the general public, the private sector, and civil society organizations, among others. Recently, the office supported the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda in the preparation of the first Urban Forum in Spain, held in October 2021.

Finally, since its creation, the UNHCOS has provided strategic support to the National Habitat Committees and various Spanish delegations in their preparation of the Spanish contributions in Habitat III and in the Seventh, Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh sessions of the World Urban Forum, among other support. In addition, it has also provided programmatic and technical support to different parties involved in Sustainable Urban Development through 24 specific initiatives and facilitating 38 exchanges of best practices, 12 workshops in Latin America and 46 city-to-city activities.
2) Support to UN-Habitat’s Normative Work through collaboration with Spanish Partners

FOSTERING EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

The UNHCOS fosters the generation of specialized and cutting-edge knowledge, particularly in relation to the definition, coordination, and implementation of national and sub-national urban strategies. The UNHCOS promotes the creation of spaces for national and global debate in relation to the normative and technical work of UN-Habitat (UNH), such as the Expert Group Meetings (EGM). Through these spaces, as well as the production of documents related to urban policies and strategies, the evolution in the Spanish context is enriched and Spanish examples of urban policies and strategies are linked to global agendas.

In addition, UNHCOS supports the normative work of UN-Habitat by helping in the development of:

- tools for the implementation of national urban policies in highly decentralized countries;
- the development of means to implement global agendas in high-income countries and regions based on its principles of universality.

Since 2013, the office has designed, planned and carried out 29 Global Expert Group Meetings2 (EGM) and workshops, promoting and positioning UN-Habitat internationally as a center of expertise and specialized knowledge in topics such as:

- “Towards a new generation of Voluntary Local Reviews: Connecting VLRs and VNRs” (February, 2021). The UNHC also gave direct support for the elaboration of the II Edition of guidelines for VLR.
- “Global Urban Safety Indicators and Monitoring Tool” (October, 2020), as well as direct support for the elaboration of the tool and the Safer Cities Programme publication.
- “Creating a UN-System wide urban monitoring framework for measuring SDG 11 and NUA” (July, 2020) and direct support for the elaboration of the Framework.

Analysis and debate around urban challenges taking place in urbanized contexts such as Spain allows UNH to explore cutting-edge themes and future trends - such as aging, subnational urban agendas, international and internal migration (rural-urban and new trends on urban-rural due to pandemic effects), nature-based solutions, electric mobility, innovation and smart cities, gentrification, new instruments for financing housing policies, among others, and to build normative work from a broader and universal perspective. For example:

- “Towards effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: discussions from the subnational

2 Before 2020, these EGMs brought together in person more than 580 international experts, 215 national experts and 880 partners in this country. Since 2020, the EGMs held online or hybrid have been attended by around 500 experts from around the world.
level” (July, 2020) on Subnational Urban Agendas. Additionally, the UNHCoS is providing direct support for the elaboration of the SUP Guide.

- “Cities for All: Ageing and Inclusion” (November, 2020).

The results of these EGMs have also contributed with elements that have been incorporated into various UN-Habitat Policy Papers in the preparatory process for Habitat III and in the current implementation of the NUA.

Finally, all EGMs have had deep inter-professional collaboration and, aligned with the 2020-2023 strategic plan, aim to reinforce comprehensive and action-oriented performance within four elements of change and cross-cutting thematic areas:

1) To reduce spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum;
2) To enhance shared prosperity of cities and regions;
3) To strengthen climate action and improved urban environment;
4) Effective urban crisis prevention and response.

Cross-cutting thematic areas: (1) Resilience; (2) Safety.
3) Strategic Alliances and Resource Mobilization

The UNHCOS carries out institutional liaison and representation activities with key Spanish stakeholders to develop strong support from Member States and strengthen the mandate of UN-Habitat. The rename of UNH Line Ministry as "Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda" (MITMA), the approval in 2019 of the Spain Urban Agenda, as well as the organization of the Spanish National Urban Forum in 2021, illustrate the high-level commitment that the Spanish Government has with the NUA.

The UNHCOS has established 50 Collaboration and 18 Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) since 2012, based on alliances and trust to mobilize action.

During these years, the UNHCOS has highlighted the impact, experience, and comparative advantages of UNH to foster and develop innovative, strategic, and multi-stakeholder alliances with traditional and non-traditional partners of sustainable urbanization in Spain (decision makers and politicians at the national, sun-national and local levels, academia, professionals, civil society, private sector, and others) as well as the mobilization of resources.

Since 2012, the UNHCOS has supported the mobilization of $27,697,528. In addition to direct mobilization of these funds (69%), institutional, legal and administrative support is provided to all grants from Spanish partners, for example, the direct negotiation of ERSO remaining funds for core use in 2019 ($977,651)³.

The UNHCOS has been a pioneer in the promotion of innovative partnerships with sub-national governments (regional and local). Since 2016, when the financial crisis hit national government’s budgetary availability for cooperation, it managed to mobilized funds through subnational governments ($3,669,644).

The UNHCOS is fully self and 100% project funded⁴.

The UNHCOS also leads/supports UNH’s fundraising strategy with Spain and keeps meetings with all high level representatives in charge of Spain Cooperation policies, regarding future support to UNH and its CO in Spain⁵.

---

³ Note that during meeting with General Director of Sustainable Development and AW (19.09.2019), it was stated that Spain “hoped that approving core use of ERSO Balance Funds had an impact on the work of UN Habitat Office in Spain for continuing the successful activities in this country”. This non-earmarked support hasn’t reached this office yet.

⁴ Except for a 2011 sogt ear-marked contribution from the Spain government for its establishment – 1534,810.

⁵ Secretary of State for International Cooperation, Ms. Angeles Moreno (23.09.2020).
The office has explored **Reimbursable Cooperation Mechanisms** and elaborated related proposals. It has also been a key partner in designing and developing the overall strategy of the United Nations to promote **Private Sector** engagement for Sustainable Urban Development worldwide (led by UN-Habitat) providing case studies, lessons learnt, diagnosis, proposals and feedback from country level, as well as supporting the organization of (2) Global Business Dialogues to nurture the strategy. For Spanish companies and investment funds, UNH CO Spain has already carried out related prospecting activities.

**COMMITMENT TO MOBILIZE THE INTEREST AND ACTION OF OTHER COUNTRIES**

The high-level commitment that the Spanish Government has with the NUA, along with other subnational initiatives (**5 Subnational Urban Agendas**), has aroused key interest from countries with similar development and decentralized contexts (Western European and Latin American countries mainly).

For example, the UNHCO has celebrated 2 encounters on National Urban Policies with the support of the Ministry of Spain, and the participation of 5 Ministers, 2 Deputy Minister and 4 General Secretaries. Follow-up to foster related liaison between EU-Latin America has already been agreed with MITMA.
4) **Effective Advocacy, Outreach and Communications**

The UNHCOS is a key **loudspeaker to reach the Spanish speaking population**. Our media clips (200 aprox. every year, 473 during 2021) have reached top hits worldwide (one of our articles in El Pais, the main Spanish media platform worldwide, got 17 Million Hits).

It is also a relevant channel to **raise global awareness on UN-Habitat’s flagship work** (i.e: during the launching of the 2020 WCR, 30% of the journalists attending the global press conference were invited by UNH CO Spain); and also for broadcasting UN **high level events**, (such as the High level Political Forum, where this CO was among the top 5 countries worldwide in global coverage on social media).

In addition, it has acted as catalyst for promoting global debate that contributes to effective knowledge, organizing numerous high level advocacy events (71 outreach events, 5 UTCs, 9 WHD, 6 WCD, and 61 Urban October events), and participation of Spanish Delegations in UN-Habitat high level events, such as the World Urban Forums (99 Spanish partners, 143 events) and/or UNH Assembly (25 representatives + 20 events).

In order to raise awareness about the importance of urbanization to achieve sustainable development, the UNHCOS develops promotional and communication actions based on three strategic pillars,

a) **Promotion of the New Urban Agenda, the SDGs and other development agendas**

b) effective communication through a comprehensive multi-channel approach (own channels and social networks) and,

c) **support for global corporate promotion** platforms.

By now, UNHCOS has organized and actively participated in 129 events (forums, conferences, meetings, workshops, and others) and periodically generates high impact publications in the press and radio to influence attitudes and policies in order to mobilize actions and resources to advance in achieving sustainable urbanization and quality of life for all.

---

6 Until WUF10.