



Progress towards the Strategic Plan 2026-2029 following deliberations of the Member States at their second retreat on 30 May 2024

INTRODUCTION

This note provides a consolidated update on the progress towards the development of UN-Habitat's new Strategic Plan (2026-2029) following the deliberations of Member States at their second retreat on 30 May 2024. The retreat offered a platform for Member States to engage and discuss the strategic priorities and goals of the organization outlined in the background paper.

First, this update document presents the key insights that have resulted from discussions at the retreat. Second, it provides rearticulated key elements framing the development of the new Strategic Plan, responding to Member States' requests for clarification and recommendations during the retreat. The rearticulation also takes into consideration reflections by the Task Force held after the retreat.

KEY INSIGHTS

These key insights have been summarized from the record of deliberations of the Member States at the retreat.

Vision:

- ✓ Replace `just` with `inclusive` or `resilient`
- ✓ Position UN-Habitat's strategic role as the leading agency for the sustainable urban development agenda in the vision
- ✓ Base wording on SDG11

Priorities:

- ✓ **Core (priority 1) and complementary mandates (priorities 2 and 3)** are imbalanced towards the latter
- ✓ Reduce number of priorities by merging priorities 2 and 3, focusing on priority 1 and 3 or priorities 1 and 2
- ✓ Retain three priorities for developing systematic indicators
- ✓ Address imbalance at the level of goals
- ✓ Priority 1:
 - Replace `basic services` with `urban planning`
 - Address social (poverty) and economic (prosperity) dimensions equally
- ✓ Priority 2:
 - Clarify overlaps with priority 1 and 3
 - Maintain climate action and urban environment as one distinct priority

- ✓ Priority 3:
 - In addition to response and recovery, crisis prevention is key
 - Social and economic resilience should be addressed more explicitly
- ✓ General feedback on priorities:
 - **Resource mobilization** is a clear priority to all Member States. Agreement must be found as to where and how to position it in the Strategic Plan. Resource mobilization is a cross-cutting issue that can serve as an enabler to achieve the plan. The Strategic Plan comes first as a strong basis and good narrative to be able to raise resources
 - Effectiveness and delivery on the ground is key
 - **Localization**
 - Elevate localization from goal to priority
 - Localization as one vehicle among others to deliver the mandate, not as a priority per se
 - Stronger focus on **rural-urban continuum** needed - potentially mentioned in priority 1
 - Each priority should be as focused as possible
 - Priorities should be formulated as statements without verbs
 - Keep priorities simple and clear and keep the Strategic Plan in concise and simple language

Goals:

- ✓ Clarify **how the goals and priorities are interlinked**
- ✓ Reformulation of goals:
 - Currently not formulated as goals but as (comprehensive) crosscutting enablers of priorities, or second layer of objectives
 - Must be more specific, measurable and achievable / Monitorability – accountability is central
- ✓ Wording and thematic inclusion:
 - Increase the amount of urban green space; integrated urban development; digital technology
 - Goal 1: proposal to replace “enable” by “support” or “promote”; suggest reference to a “whole-of-government approach” and to the principle of subsidiarity
 - Goal 2: reflect on whether the integration of spatial planning and finance risk omission of important aspects
 - Goal 3: the use of data, knowledge and digital tools should be strengthened.

General comments:

- ✓ **Rethink and readjust the structure and flow of the Strategic Plan**
 - interlinkages between vision, priorities and goals must be clear
 - Be clear on the WHAT and HOW
 - Challenges and corresponding role of UN-Habitat must be articulated more clearly

- Clarify whether the Strategic Plan is moving away from the Domains of Change approach, and explain why
- ✓ **Enhance multi-stakeholder cooperation** with Member States, other UN agencies and partnerships with academia, civil society and private sector, and **stakeholder inclusion** in implementation of the Strategic Plan]
- ✓ Balance between **normative and operational** is important, as well as their interlinkage
- ✓ The Strategic Plan should be **future oriented**:
 - ✓ Importance to address challenges of the future, beyond the current issues
 - ✓ Specify a clear **implementation plan**
 - ✓ Aim for scale and growth
- ✓ **Alignment with and contribution to global agendas**
 - ✓ The achievement of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, SDG 11 in particular, should be further referenced in the Strategic Plan
 - ✓ UN-Habitat's scope of action should not be limited to SDG 11 to include other commitments (New Urban Agenda, resolutions etc.)
 - ✓ Highlight how UN-Habitat can contribute to the implementation of other global agendas/strategies to demonstrate its relevance in the multilateral system

KEY ELEMENTS

The WHY - our challenges

Across the world, urban economies generate the greater part of national gross domestic products and drive economic growth. However, in many countries, urbanization translates to a good quality of life for only a relatively few and is accompanied by deepening poverty and inequality, especially for marginalized vulnerable groups. Poorly managed urbanization has resulted in major gaps in adequate housing across cities and communities. Informal settlements and slums where people live in crowded, unsafe conditions without basic services, often in extreme poverty, continue to proliferate. Across the world, homelessness is a widespread challenge.

Urban sprawl is getting worse with the physical expansion of cities increasing faster than urban population growth. Land consumption, amplified by unchecked urbanization and declining densities of growing cities, increases global greenhouse gas emissions and generates more waste, air and water pollution, all of which erode urban biodiversity and ecosystem services that communities in human settlements depend on.

Natural and man-made hazards have an increasing impact in urban settings, and vulnerable communities are disproportionately exposed to them. Forced displacement by the effects of climate change, armed conflicts and violence can have significant consequences on territories, cities, and human settlements as displaced people move to urban centres to find home, safety, work, and access to services. These displacements can disrupt social cohesion in urban areas due to limited absorption capacity and resources.

The WHAT – our proposed impact areas to address the challenges

[original proposal was labelled as “priorities”]

- access to adequate housing and basic services for inclusive prosperity and poverty eradication
- improved urban environment and climate action in human settlements
- more effective urban crisis response and recovery for resilient human settlements

[Revised proposal: **impact areas**]

The proposed impact areas focus on addressing three different dimensions of the challenges whilst recognizing that they are closely inter-related: for example, the need to adapt to climate change and environmental concerns is directly related to issues of housing, informal settlements and slums. At the same time, unbalanced social, economic, and ecological functions of land management affect housing, informal settlements and slums but also planned urban sprawl, both encumbering ecosystems services, and thus degrading environmental resilience of human settlements.

Increased access to adequate housing and the transformation of informal settlements and slums for prosperity and poverty alleviation

Human settlements constitute the built environment where people live together, and they can enable more productive economies. These intertwined social and economic functions are central in addressing inclusive prosperity and poverty eradication. By properly planning and managing rapid urbanization, developing infrastructure and institutions that support equitable economic growth, and creating more decent jobs, a more prosperous society can be fostered. This provides prerequisites for ensuring a decent quality of life for all, to which gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are imperative.

In this context, addressing the nexus of housing, land, and basic services is essential for inclusive prosperity and poverty eradication. It requires maximizing the social function of land through appropriate compactness, density and mixed land use, infill or planned urban extension strategies, to trigger economies of scale and agglomeration. Whilst focusing on the transformation of informal settlements and slums is urgent, a more comprehensive approach to the global housing crisis also needs to be prioritized.

Improved urban environment and climate action for sustainable human settlements

The evolution of human settlements impacts the environment and climate change. It requires accelerated multilevel action in urban and territorial planning and management to foster human settlements in harmony with nature. It is imperative to promote sustainable management and using natural resources and land more efficiently to tackle the urban dimension of interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and waste.

UN-Habitat’s work adds value by introducing a strong urban planning and design dimension to the efforts of the United Nations agencies leading in climate and environment. This includes supporting subnational authorities which have a key role in implementing local-level policies for adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects.

More effective urban crisis prevention, response and recovery for resilient human settlements

Being prepared for and overcoming natural and man-made urban crises can be achieved by building the socio-economic and environmental resilience of human settlements. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop a better shared understanding of the complexities of urban crises to guide effective prevention and response. Scaling up disaster preparedness and anticipatory action in cities requires initiating more sustainable and durable solutions at all stages of urban crisis across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus. Using reconstruction after hazards is an opportunity to build back better and helps put urban areas and surrounding territories back on track.

A human settlements approach to urban crisis response contributes, where relevant, to longer-term stability and resilience.

The WHO - our role in UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat works with national and local governments and other stakeholders to guide more effective planning and management of urbanization, cities, and human settlements leaving no one and no place behind. The programme supports the design and implementation of legal frameworks, policies, and programs and helps building capacity to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. UN-Habitat guides the delivery of adequate housing and basic services, ensuring the balance of the social, economic, and environmental functions of land, charting the path towards human settlements to become more sustainable in all dimensions and more resilient to crises.

This work is done by supporting integrated urban and territorial planning, more effective management of systems of cities, human settlements, rural-urban continuum, ensuring that cities offer advanced services in health, education, and employment to communities in broader territories beyond urban limits. It promotes sustainable and territorially coherent investment in urban development enabling effective implementation through addressing the nexus of housing, land, and basic services, prioritizing action in the informal settlements and slums.

UN-Habitat leverages the potential of localization through an integrated approach to foster more effective participatory multilevel governance systems for the SDGs, facilitating dialogue and cooperation across levels with the goal of promoting locally responsive governance reforms.

As the leading global authority in the United Nations system on cities and human settlements, offering normative guidance, and using its power to convene a broad range of actors and stakeholders, UN-Habitat promotes sustainable urbanization in the multilateral system. The programme's integrated normative and operational support to governments is integral to the broader United Nations system's efforts towards a more sustainable future. This adds complementary value on the themes of environment, climate, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian issues by providing guidance on the urban and territorial dimensions of these broader challenges to sustainability.

The HOW - our means of implementation

[original proposal was labelled as “goals”]

- more effective multi-level governance of human settlements and their systems
- integrated spatial planning and finance for sustainable urbanization across all territorial scales
- evidence-based policies and plans through improved capacity building, knowledge, data, digital tools, and foresight

[Revised proposal]

The notion of means of implementation is widely used in the UN system and describes an interdependent mix of resources and actions necessary to effectively implement sustainable development initiatives. In this proposal, the means of implementation encompass two substantive and three functional workstreams, addressing all proposed impact areas together. In the next phase of developing the Strategic Plan, the means of implementation will be supported by more specific attainable goals.

Substantive means

Integrated urban and territorial planning, management, and finance for sustainable urban development

Reinvigorating long-term and integrated urban and territorial planning and design enables optimizing the spatial dimension of the urban form and deliver the positive outcomes of urbanization. Effective participatory spatial planning and management are central to leaving no one and no place behind – including fostering gender equality.

Financing strategies are a fundamental part of the planning and design process to close the gap in implementation. Recognizing the transformative force of sustainable urbanization in national development planning improves strategic prioritization of investments in sustainable and coherent territorial development across the rural-urban continuum. This requires close collaboration with international development banks and the private sector to ensure coherence of policy support and the alignment of large-scale urban investments with the principles of the New Urban Agenda and to facilitate increased investment in sustainable urbanization.

Effective participatory multi-level governance and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG Localization is a paradigm shift aimed at transforming governance and developing systems at all levels – global, national and local, by anchoring action on the priorities of our local communities and the development of our human settlements in a participatory approach. UN-Habitat will continue supporting cities in localizing the SDGs through local impact interventions anchored in data, strategic decision-making and implementation, while offering solutions for capacity building and financing for the SDGs.

Functional means

Enhanced knowledge, data, digital tools, and foresight, and strengthened capacity building

UN-Habitat will focus on narrowing the gap in urban research, intelligence and data to support evidence-based policy formulation, implementation and dialogue. It will continue to advance robust and timely monitoring of SDG 11 and the NUA. The programme will promote and support action research, joining the efforts of researchers and practitioners cross-fertilizing diverse competences for shaping effective solutions for sustainable urban development.

Foresight, lessons learned, and knowledge of the latest global and regional trends and transitions will be leveraged to shape global policy narratives, offer normative guidance, deliver technical assistance, and support stakeholders in building required capacity to implement Agenda 2030, the New Urban Agenda, and the Resolutions of United Nations Habitat Assembly.

A people-centred smart cities approach will be further promoted to maximize the inclusive impact of digital technology.

Effective resource mobilization

UN-Habitat will strategically engage in the main impact areas to mobilize greater, diversified and more predictable resources for its work, especially in response to the demand in developing countries.

Constructive partnerships, advocacy and communication

UN-Habitat will expand its partnerships and stakeholder collaboration, advocating for sustainable urbanization and urban development through a global community of practice, and compellingly communicate its mission and achievements to a broader society in the global audience, convening deliberations at global and regional scales, including at the highest level. It will leverage expertise and capacities from international organizations and global knowledge and practice networks as relevant.

The WHERE

UN-Habitat will address the impact areas at the global, regional, national and subnational levels. To remain both globally relevant and locally applicable, the proposed interventions of UN-Habitat address articulated global impact areas but remain adaptable and translatable to the diverse contexts in response to requests from Member States.

The WHEN

The key elements of the strategic plan, proposed above, when reviewed and approved by the Member States, will provide priorities for UN-Habitat to focus its efforts from 2026 to 2029. The totality of work of UN-Habitat under its broader mandates may cover thematic and functional areas additional to the ones proposed above, including those responding to specific demand at the country level. Some current workstreams may continue, without being included in the proposed strategic focus. The efforts of the programme in this time frame will be primarily dedicated to addressing the challenges as articulated, seeking impact in the areas as defined, and refining the means of implementation as described to maximize the effectiveness of our work.