



Strategic Plan 2026-2029 Draft Annotated Outline

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Note: this draft document has been produced to inform the 3rd retreat of UN-Habitat’s Member States on developing the Strategic Plan for the period of 2026-2029.

Introduction

Reflecting on the strategic plan 2020-2025 and lessons learned from its implementation and evaluations, this plan builds on the former themes but refines the approach and introduces a clear focus for the years 2026-2029. The proposed approach encapsulates the previous domains of change of the strategic plan 2020-2025 as the impact areas within which the strategic focus is on access to adequate housing, land, and basic services. This plan articulates the themes as challenges to the global society, as set out also in global agendas, where UN-Habitat can have a focused impact through its mandate and specialized expertise.

This section outlines key considerations that inform the refined approach to the development of the strategic plan. The key elements presented in this plan are subject to the following purposes, principles and considerations.

The purposes of the strategic plan are:

- to articulate priority challenges and strategic focus for 2026-2029;
- to identify UN-Habitat's added value to address these challenges; and,
- to guide the work of UN-Habitat, including the annual work programme and the allocation of core resources.

To fulfill these purposes, the five guiding principles for the strategic plan are to be:

- ambitious, relevant, and responsive;
- focused on impact and prioritized;
- flexible and adaptable to specific contexts;
- evidence- and knowledge-based; and,
- manageable, realistic, effective, and measurable.

The strategic plan balances the following considerations:

- continuity and foresight;
- unique proposition and added value;
- sustainable urbanization at a national scale, while working with individual cities and human settlements; and,
- global relevance and local application.

Flow of the content of the document

The content of the document follows the flow of reasoning presented below:



The WHY:

CHALLENGES to the global society

The WHAT:

STRATEGIC FOCUS in the context of vision

IMPACT AREAS where those challenges are addressed

The HOW:

OUR MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

to address the challenges

OUR PLANNED RESULTS that UN-Habitat will seek to achieve to address the challenges

OUR ACTION What will UN-Habitat do to attain the results

Challenges to the global society

A global housing crisis is emerging, alongside the accelerating impact of climate change and pollution, the loss of biodiversity and pollution and the increasing prevalence of conflict. There is an urgency to drive solutions that are sustainable, scalable and transformational. It calls for broad coalitions to achieve the global agendas agreed upon to overcome the challenges of our time. Urbanization constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge with respect to achieving sustainable development in times of global crises.

Across the world, urban economies generate the majority of national gross domestic products and drive economic growth. However, in many countries, urbanization translates to a good quality of life for only a relative few and is accompanied by deepening poverty and inequality, especially for marginalized vulnerable groups. Poorly managed urbanization has resulted in major shortfalls in access to adequate housing across cities and communities. Homelessness is a widespread challenge, alongside the proliferation of informal settlements and slums where people live in crowded, unsafe conditions without basic services, often in extreme poverty. By 2030, almost three billion people in the world may face some level of housing inadequacy: from homelessness to substandard and unaffordable homes¹.

Natural and man-made disasters, such as flooding, armed conflict and violence, destroy housing and infrastructure, and all converge in cities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Migration and forced displacement are growing with significant consequences on territories, cities, and human settlements as people move to urban centers to find shelter, safety, employment, and access to services. If unmanaged, it can disrupt social cohesion in urban areas and fuel informality due to gaps in absorption capacity. When planned, however, such flows of people can boost sustainable urban development growth.

Unchecked urbanization and inadequate housing increase global greenhouse gas emissions and generate more waste, air and water pollution and cities, in particular informal settlements, bear the brunt of the consequences. The global building stock is set to double by 2050 because of demographic increases in parts of Africa and Asia in particular. The way we design, locate, build and maintain housing directly shapes climate outcomes and overall urban and economic growth. Urban sprawl, largely driven by unsustainable consumption of land for housing, is resulting in declining densities, eroding biodiversity and ecosystems, growing spatial inequalities and exacerbating challenges of basic services provision, and increasing pressure on municipal financial resources.

Our strategic focus for 2026-2029

In 2026-2029, UN-Habitat will focus on **access to adequate housing, land, and basic services for all, and the transformation of informal settlements and slums** - to address the challenges outlined above within the broader **vision of sustainable urbanization**, as set out in the New Urban Agenda, and its direct positive impact on achieving the 2030 Agenda, while considering **three relevant impact areas**.



Tenure security



Basic Services



Affordability



Habitability



Accessibility



Location



Cultural adequacy

i: The seven aspects of adequate housing²

The focus on adequate housing, land, and basic services will maximize UN-Habitat's added value to address the challenges described for the programmatic cycle of 2026-2029. It draws on UN-Habitat's mandate, its expertise and its role within the UN system. Building also on the recent UN-Habitat Assembly Resolutions on

¹ United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals [Report](#) 2019

² Adequate housing aspects are defined as follows: (a) Legal security of tenure; (b) Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; (c) Affordability; (d) Habitability; (e) Accessibility; (f) Location; (g) Cultural adequacy. [The General Comment No. 4 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

‘Adequate Housing for All’ (Res. 2.7) and ‘Accelerating the transformation of Informal Settlements and Slums’ (Res. 2.2), it will put housing back at the center of UN-Habitat’s work. Access to adequate housing, as a fundamental human right, is a cornerstone of a new social contract, crucial to fostering inclusive, sustainable, and equitable development. It recognizes housing as a common good, not an asset, and the important social and ecological functions of land. Due to its multi-faced and cross-sectoral nature, adequate housing has shown its potential as the engine of inclusive and sustainable urbanization with linkages to most of the other SDGs – particularly to addressing poverty (Goal 1) and reducing inequality (Goal 10), particularly for women (Goal 5).



ii: Housing at the centre of sustainable and inclusive development

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) elevates housing as fundamental to economic development and poverty reduction, championing a "Housing at the Centre" approach. This goes beyond merely constructing houses to a holistic framework of adequate housing, integrating urban planning and prioritizing human rights and sustainable development. Beyond the physical structure (a roof and four walls), housing is essential for health, dignity, safety, and social inclusion, also as recognized in earlier global frameworks including the Habitat Agenda of 1996 (Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements). It provides secure access to services, employment, and urban life, enhancing social cohesion and well-being. Secure housing and land tenure are particularly vital for women and girls, increasing their independence, reducing poverty, and protecting against exploitation and violence.

As a pillar of urban development, access to adequate housing promotes inclusive cities by reducing inequality and tackling poverty. Energy-efficient, resilient housing designs mitigate climate change impacts and contribute to the sustainability agenda. Overcoming the loss of home and secure tenure are key in crisis response and peacebuilding to promote stability. Additionally, housing reflects cultural identities, fostering connections to communities and the environment.

While the world continues to urbanize, the demand for adequate, safe, accessible, and affordable housing increases exponentially. Good urban planning can enable the provision of housing, land, and basic services that is connected to livelihood and job opportunities, with access to transportation and other services, contributing to reducing spatial inequalities and urban sprawl. Ultimately the provision of adequate housing is a necessary means to achieve inclusive and prosperous cities and communities.

This strategic focus is aligned with UN-Habitat’s core areas of its mandate where it is uniquely positioned in leading the multilateral system and adds value to the work of other entities by concentrating on the territorial dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals and multi-level governance.

Our role and impact areas

UN-Habitat’s role is, through its strategic focus, to provide guidance and support on harnessing the transformative potential of sustainable urbanization³ to address the above outlined challenges to the

³ Sustainable urbanization is defined as “the spatial manifestation of urban development processes that creates a built environment with norms, institutions and governance systems enabling individuals, households and societies to maximise their potential, optimise a vast range of services so that homes and dynamic neighbourhoods, cities and towns are planned, built, renewed and consolidated restraining adverse impacts on the environment while safeguarding the quality of life, needs and livelihood of its present and future populations.”; UN-Habitat, [INPUT TO POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: WORKING GROUP B](#)

global society more effectively. UN-Habitat intends to contribute to the implementation of global agendas through its strategic focus by translating policy frameworks developed in UN conferences and summits into programmes at the regional and country level and, through technical assistance, supporting Member States in building national and subnational capacities.

Guided by the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2030, and in partnership and coalition with other actors of the multi-lateral system, experience has shown that an integrated focus on adequate housing, land and basic services is a powerful tool to deliver impact, directly or indirectly, in three important areas: Equitable and inclusive prosperity and poverty eradication; Crisis prevention, response and recovery; Climate action and environment.

As part of its role in contributing to impact in the above areas, UN-Habitat promotes integrated approaches to urban and territorial planning, design, and investment, embedded in broader evidence-based development policies; encourages integrated systems of cities and human settlements; and supports cooperation among levels of government and across sectors.

Equitable and inclusive prosperity for poverty eradication

A more prosperous and inclusive society is fostered by properly planning and managing rapid urbanization and sustainable development of cities and human settlements, by developing infrastructure and institutions that support equitable economic growth, and by creating more decent jobs. These interventions alleviate poverty and provide a decent quality of life for all, including gender equality and the empowerment of marginalized groups. Underpinning these intertwined social and economic functions is the nexus of adequate housing, land, and basic services, which are essential to lay the groundwork for a society where everyone can thrive. The housing sector virtually touches every single aspect of the economy of a country and interfaces with practically every sector (technology, research, water and sanitation, building industry, land and property rights and the financial sector). A well-functioning housing, land, and basic services nexus has the potential to drive growth.

While acknowledging the urgency of the transformation of informal settlements and slums, UN-Habitat promotes adequate housing in all its aspects. The programme will enhance its work to provide knowledge and data and develop capacity at all levels of government for evidence-based urban development policies and legislation which comprehensively address the issues of adequate housing, land and basic services, maximizing the social and ecological functions of land through appropriate compactness, density and mixed land use, infill or planned urban extension strategies.

Crisis prevention, response and recovery

UN-Habitat has a key role to further strengthen a shared understanding of the complex impact of converging crises on cities and territories to guide more effective prevention and response, with particular attention to the most vulnerable. Experience shows that crisis response offers opportunities to create transformative shifts, accelerating progress towards the SDGs and other global agendas, using urban profiling and urban recovery frameworks to enable bottom-up participatory action. The different crises are increasingly resulting in large scale displacement, where UN-Habitat can contribute to better foresight analysis to anticipate the impact of crises on cities and territories, strengthening prevention and resilience. UN-Habitat is helping to ensure a more cohesive response to displacement across the humanitarian, peace and development nexus, advancing the importance of ensuring solutions from the start during humanitarian response while fully integrating solutions to displacement in urban and territorial development strategies.

The strategic focus on access to adequate housing solutions, land and basic services for those displaced can help provide a framework for a more integrated response with all actors involved, using urban and territorial planning and multi-level governance to localize and enable solutions, working across the nexus. UN-Habitat can help to strengthen the role of local governments, ensure enabling policies, financing instruments are in place at national level and act as an honest broker. Building back better should include a strong focus on the restoration of social cohesion by prioritizing equity and inclusion. Adequate housing, land and access to basic services are central to the peace and security agenda and the promotion of stabilization. UN-Habitat can help to overcome underlying chronic vulnerabilities, and root causes and drivers of conflict and displacement.

Environment and climate action

There are clear interlinkages and implications between climate change and the current global housing crisis, considering (i) the need to improve and extend infrastructure, build, or improve houses, inevitably leading to an important ecological footprint in terms of emissions, use of land and pressure of urban expansion on natural surroundings; and (ii) the unjust concentrated impact of climate change effects on vulnerable territories and communities.

Adequate housing can play a key role in addressing the impacts of climate change and pollution. Energy-efficient building designs can improve indoor thermal comfort while reducing energy expenditure and poverty, as well as global carbon emissions and extractive practices. The provision of resilient housing and access to essential services can minimise deaths and economic losses caused by natural disasters. The shift towards a circular model in the buildings and construction sector can reduce waste and promote the creation of value chains based on sustainable and affordable materials.

UN-Habitat's work adds value to the efforts of the United Nations agencies leading in climate and environment through the dimension of meaningful people-centred and ecological oriented urban planning, use of land, and design. This includes support to subnational authorities who have a key role in implementing policies for adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects. To scale up impact, strong collaboration with partners is required.

Our means of implementation

This section details the means of implementation⁴ that UN-Habitat will build on to seek the desired impact. The interlinked mix of means of implementation guide the main workstreams to attain planned results in all designated impact areas through the strategic focus.

Integrated urban and territorial planning, management, investment and finance

Long-term urban and territorial planning and design underpins delivery of positive outcomes of urbanization. Participatory spatial planning and management in harmony with nature are central to leaving no one and no place behind – including gender equality and the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups. UN-Habitat provides normative guidance and technical assistance to improve the capacity of all levels of governments to coherently plan, manage and implement productive, equitable, inclusive and environmentally sustainable urban development.

Recognizing the transformative force of sustainable urbanization in national development planning and addressing the territorial and urban dimensions through spatial planning and management improves strategic prioritization of investments in sustainable and coherent territorial development across the rural-urban continuum. Coherent spatial plans on all scales underpin sound decisions on investment in infrastructure and buildings. They can help mobilize resources for implementation, enabling to open the fiscal space to national and local governments and building on land-based finance, supporting stable local level revenues and underpinning synergy of various financing streams. UN-Habitat, in collaboration with multilateral development banks and the private sector, helps governments seek coherence of territorial development policies and the alignment of large-scale investments with the New Urban Agenda.

Participatory multi-level governance and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG localization is 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 to a participatory approach. UN-Habitat will leverage the potential of localization to foster more effective multilevel governance systems for the SDGs, facilitating dialogue and cooperation across all levels with the ultimate goal of promoting locally-responsive governance reforms.

⁴ The notion of 'Means of implementation' in the context of Transformative Agenda 2030 describes the interdependent mix of financial resources, technology development and transfer, capacity-building, inclusive and equitable globalization and trade, regional integration, as well as the creation of a national enabling environment required to implement the new sustainable development agenda, particularly in developing countries. [TST issues brief: means of implementation; Global partnership for achieving sustainable development](#). In this plan, this mix is adapted to the remit of UN-Habitat.

Knowledge, data, digitalisation, foresight, and capacity building

UN-Habitat undertakes policy research intelligence, and data analytics to generate knowledge in support of effective evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. This is grounded in and geared for action, to cross fertilize knowledge and practice. UN-Habitat continues to advance robust and timely monitoring of the New Urban Agenda and the territorial dimensions of the SDGs, and SDG 11 in particular, and addresses the capacity gaps to fast track implementation. The programme promotes and supports action research, joining the efforts of diverse researchers and practitioners for shaping effective solutions for sustainable urban development. UN-Habitat will strengthen its normative work by better integrating efforts on the global scale and in regions and countries, leading to greater impact at the level of policies and on the ground, and adding value to the current portfolio of projects and programs.

Foresight, lessons learned, and knowledge of the latest global and regional trends are leveraged to shape global policy narratives, to offer normative guidance, to deliver technical assistance, and to support stakeholders in building capacity to implement Agenda 2030, the New Urban Agenda, and the resolutions of the United Nations Habitat Assembly. UN-Habitat works to maximize the impact of digital technology, among other through “promoting a people-centred smart cities approach [...] to ensure that innovation and digital technologies are used to help cities and human settlements”⁵.

Partnerships, coalitions, advocacy and communication

UN-Habitat will strengthen its partnerships and stakeholder collaboration by actively engaging its advisory groups and prioritizing strategic coalitions. By advocating for sustainable urbanization and development UN-Habitat will build on its convening power and partnership platforms such as the World Urban Forum, New Urban Agenda Platform, Urban October, and World Urban Campaign. The agency will continue to bring together diverse voices and leverage expertise and capacities through stakeholder engagement, e.g. communities of practice, seeking expert advice, sharing experiences and best practices, and scientific contributions to discussions, furthering inclusive decision-making and building support for and partnership in the implementation.

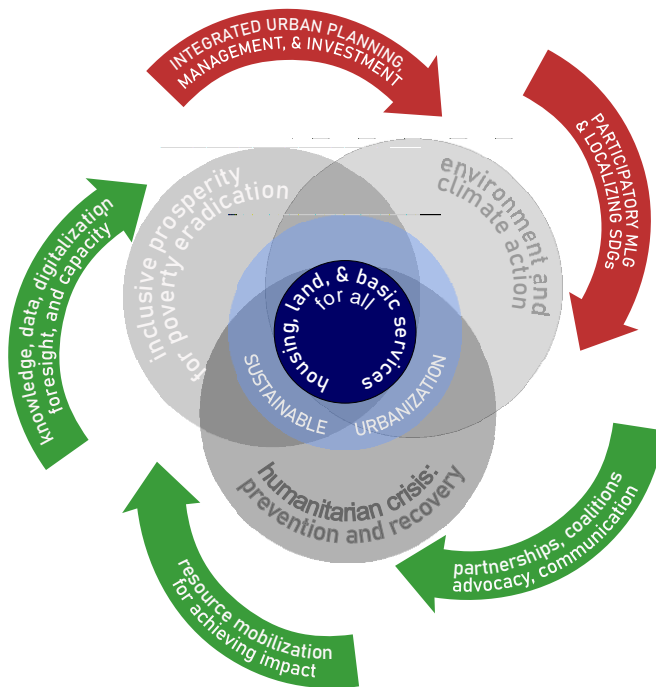
UN-Habitat will focus its communication on the strategic focus in the three impact areas of the new strategic plan, showcasing how the agency leads and supports the multilateral system efforts to address global challenges within its core mandate and adds value in accelerating multi-level action to achieve sustainable development. These communication efforts will increase understanding of the transformative potential of sustainable urban development and adequate housing and gain recognition from governments, media, donors, and broad global audiences.

Effective resource mobilization

UN-Habitat engages in the main impact areas to mobilize greater, diversified and more predictable resources for its work, especially in response to demand in developing countries. This engagement will also support mobilizing resources for the work of the Member States on the impact areas.

Resource mobilization is thematically guided by this plan and by the separate resource mobilization strategy. Beyond traditional donors, close collaboration is required with multilateral development banks and international financial institutions.

⁵ [UNHA Res. 2/1. International guidelines on people-centred smart cities](#)

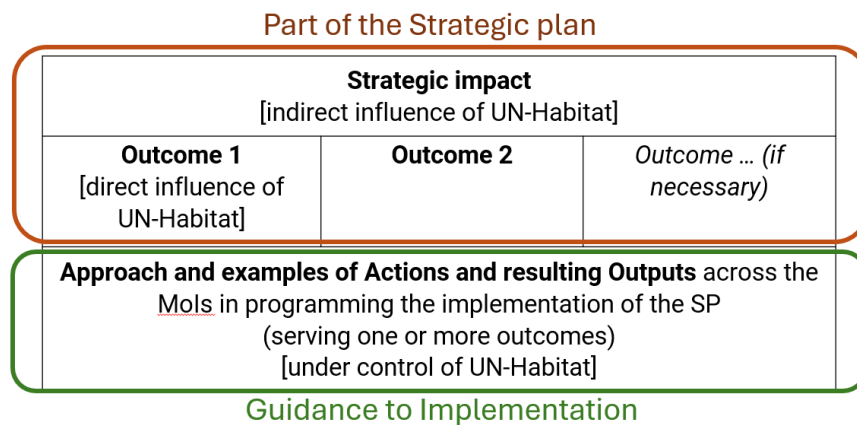


iii: Key elements of the substantive framework

Our planned results

This section explains what UN-Habitat needs to achieve across the strategic focus in the three impact areas through the defined the means of implementation, and what the organization will do to achieve it. For coherence, the planned results will be achieved through interventions employing all means of implementation.

The planned results will be arranged in a hierarchy, differentiated by the degree of influence of delivery by the organization: control of the outputs, direct influence on the outcomes, and indirect influence on the impacts. This model of planned results is arranged in a hierarchy of actions & outputs > outcomes > strategic impact:



Examples:

Strategic impact [indirect influence of UN-Habitat]:

more people, especially vulnerable groups in slums and informal settlements and those affected by humanitarian crisis and climate impacts, prosper and have their lives transformed through better access to more adequate housing, land and basic services and better planning in harmony with nature.

Outcome 1 [direct influence of UN-Habitat]: more governments are better informed, positioned to address key issues in housing adequacy, and they seek systemic change by developing evidence-based policies and programmes to urgently improve access to adequate housing, land and basic services with considerations of inclusive prosperity, management of humanitarian crises and environmental and climate action leaving no-one and no-place behind.

Outcome 2 [direct influence of UN-Habitat]: more governments are better informed and positioned to accelerate the transformation and prevention of slums and informal settlements, and they develop evidence-based policies and programmes to this end.

(More outcomes could be added if necessary)

Our implementation

This plan guides efforts at global, regional, country, and local levels. The Member States and the Secretariat will prioritize allocation of core resources to implement this plan.

The Secretariat will seek ensuring coherence and integration of normative and operational activities, and deepened collaboration across divisions of the Secretariat for synergetic efforts and effective delivery in implementing this plan.

The plan applies to diverse contexts and will be prioritized in line with specific needs at regional and country level, as identified in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and acknowledging shared challenges at sub-regional level.

Linking strategic outcomes to implementation

The actions of implementing this strategic plan should:

- clearly describe what UN-Habitat and its partners will do to attain the strategic outcomes and impact,
- and define outputs that will be produced in result of these actions.

Examples of such actions and outputs:

Example 1:

ACTION: UN-Habitat will gear urban and territorial planning and investment work to support more access to adequate housing, land and basic services and the transformation and prevention of slums and informal settlements;

OUTPUT [under control of UN-Habitat]: concrete normative urban and territorial planning and investment methodologies and tools are developed and refocused to enable robust spatial planning and its diligent implementation by governments and stakeholders, more effectively addressing issues of access to adequate housing and the transformation and prevention of slums and informal settlements across all impact areas;

OUTPUT: more countries address adequate housing issues and the transformation and prevention of slums and informal settlements in the CCA and subsequently include these in the outcomes of the UNSDCF through all relevant actions and outputs across all impact areas.

Example 2:

ACTION: UN-Habitat will, building on its convening powers, assemble and lead diverse partners for adequate housing, land and basic services, and the prevention and transformation of slums and informal settlements, increasing its global outreach on the strategic focus, organize knowledge in this field, and communicate strong messages on the relevance of this focus and systemic changes required to address the challenges;

OUTPUT: a global coalition that improves knowledge, evidence, and implementation of policies and programmes for adequate housing, land and basic services as well as the prevention and transformation of slums and informal settlements across all impact areas.

OUTPUT: meaningful and implementable recommendations of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All and other intergovernmental debates;

OUTPUT: the website, social media and other knowledge dissemination and communication are systematically centred to support reaching the strategic impact and outcomes across all impact areas.

The main instrument to implement this plan is the annual work programme and budget. Its subprogrammes will be structured in line with this plan.

The implementation of the plan will be monitored through existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and reported through the annual report of UN-Habitat. To measure performance quantitative targets will be established only for the outputs that are under direct control of UN-Habitat. Measuring outcomes may combine quantitative and qualitative targets, whilst impacts will be assessed through narrative reporting, including some data on change and trends.