UN-HABITAT

SUMMARY REPORT

Consultation Process
International Guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities

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1. Introduction

As requested by Member States in the Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res1 on international guidelines on people-centred smart cities[1], adopted at the Second Session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly in 2023, UN-Habitat developed international guidelines on people-centred smart cities through an inclusive consultative process. **Over 800 people we consulted globally**:

Since November 2023, a **Global Expert Working Group** of 31 global experts, nominated by Member States, and appointed by UN-Habitat's Executive Director, advised UN-Habitat in the drafting process, meeting on monthly basis, in addition to 3 in-person **Experts Group Meetings,** which served to review the guidelines draft more in dept. A total of 18 consultations were held, divided as follows:

- 3 **regional consultations**
- 1 **regional validation consultation**
- 7 **stakeholder consultations**
- 7 **ad-hoc consultations** an online **consultation** open to external stakeholders to provide feedback on the 4th draft of the International Guidelines.

2. Overview of Consultations

Consultation	Date and location	Summary
Global Expert Group Meetings		
EGM 1	17-18 April 2024 *Strasbourg, France*	Hosted by the Eurométropolis of Strasbourg, the Grand Est Region and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, 23 nominated global experts reviewed the structure, definition, and annotated outline, as well as workplan and roadmap.
EGM 2	26-27 September 2024 *Online*	Global experts reviewed the third draft of the guidelines, the thematic areas and actor responsibilities, as well as the final draft of the world smart cites outlook.
EGM 3	22-23 January 2025 *Online*	Global experts reviewed the fifth draft of the guidelines and provided comments, reflected on the outcomes of the consultations process and advised on the draft guidelines' implementation strategy.
Regional Consultation Meetings		
Latin American and North America	21 November 2024 *Online*	All regional consultations were held online and co-hosted with regional commissions of the UN. UNECE co-hosted **Latin America and North America** as well as **Africa and Western Europe and other states**, which were attended respectively by 6 and 13 experts nominated by Member States. The latter was also co-hosted by UNECA. The **Asia Pacific and Oceania**, co-hosted by UNESCAP and UNESCWA, convened 8 experts nominated by Member States online, while. 19 participants, representing mayors on-site on courtesy of UNESCAP.
Africa, Eastern Western Europe and Other States	26 November *Online*	
Asia Pacific and Oceania	28 November 2024 *Hybrid Bangkok, Thailand*	
Eastern and Western Europe and Other States (Validation Consultation)	28-29 January 2025 *Bratislava, Slovakia*	Hosted by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, the meeting convened a total of 21 experts nominated by Member States, along with 10 selected practitioners invited by the host. Participants reviewed the guidelines and discussed implementation of the guidelines.
Stakeholder Consultation Meetings		
Civil Society Organizations	6 May 2024 *Nairobi, Kenya*	This workshop, hosted during the UN Civil Society Conference, gathered 35 participants to discuss the primary foundations that make smart cities people-centred, and zoom in on the actions that this requires from a civil society perspective.
Academia	18 - 20 June 2024 *Hamburg*	Hosted by UNITAC Hamburg, the hybrid conference brought together 227 academic practitioners to discuss how data-driven urban technologies can reduce social inequality in the context of the guidelines.
Local and Regional Governments	10 September 2024 *Online*	Co-hosted by UCLG, WeGO, Eurocities and Smart City Expo World Congress, it convened over 90 LRGs' representatives and produced a joint communique, positioning the Guidelines and Global Digital Compact as an opportunity for convergence of global frameworks with local leadership.

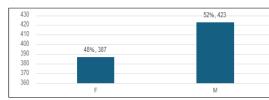[1] Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res1: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/09/english_9.pdf

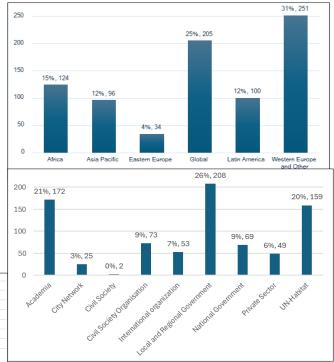| Consultation	Date and location	Summary
UN-Habitat internal consultation	12 September 2024 *Online*	The consultation, attended by 107 UN-Habitat staff, was held to ensure the International Guidelines reflect UN-Habitat's existing work and priorities while becoming a lighthouse to guide future engagements of UN-Habitat.
International Organizations	25 September 2024 *Online*	The consultation engaged 36 colleagues from international organizations including United Nations Agencies, International Financing Institutions, European Commission and OECD to ensure the guidelines build on existing work and to explore synergies for future collaboration.
Private Sector Consultation	1-2 October 2024 *Paolo Alto, California United States*	Hosted by Carnegie California, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's West Coast office and program, the consultation gathered 39 practitioners and private sector representatives to provide feedback.
UN-Habitat Advisory Groups	27 June; 16 October 2024 *Online*	A first meeting with SAGE aimed to provide a status update on the guidelines' progress. The second meeting was organized to review the guidelines.
Open Online Consultation		
Open Online Consultation	17 October - 17 November 2024	External stakeholders were invited to contribute to the drafting process by reviewing the 4th draft of the International Guidelines online. In total, 60 contributions were received.
Ad-Hoc Consultations		
Closed-door Dialogue for Mayors and City Leaders	28 May 2024 *Geneva, Switzerland*	Hosted by Global Cities Hub, on the sidelines of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), 11 Mayors and city-leaders convened to directly share experiences, perspective, and strategic input on the guidelines.
Workshop Consultation in Latin America	5 September 2024 *Maceio, Brazil*	Hosted by the City of Maceio, during the 'Connected People, Integrated Cities' conference, the meeting gathered 35 officials in Latin America to provide feedback.
Thematic Consultation: Urban Climate Change and Resilience	10 September 2024 *Montreal, Canada*	Co-hosted by Open North and the Next Generation Cities Institute, during the Innovate4Cities Conference, the meeting gathered 25 experts to discuss how digital transformation in cities impacts climate change, reduces carbon emissions and supports the green transition.
Exchange Dialogue	18 Oktober 2024 *Berlin, Germany*	Hosted by The International Smart Cities Network, during the Smart Country Convention, the dialogue encouraged participants to provide recommendations in the light of the Guidelines in local context.
CSO Contribution Workshop for the Open Online Consultation	30 October 2024 *Online*	Hosted by Open Data Charter, this meeting centered on the roles, needs, and barriers facing CSOs in leading people-centered, inclusive, and sustainable digital transformations in cities. 10 participants, specialized in Smart Cities, Digital Rights, and Open Data attended.
Workshop Consultation in Africa	22 November 2024 *Nairobi, Kenya*	Co-hosted by DALA, during the Africa Smart City Investment Summit, the meeting gathered around 30 government officials, experts and practitioners from across Africa to provide feedback on the guidelines.
Digital Metropolis: Expert Group Meeting	20-21 January 2025 *Barcelona, Spain*	Co-hosted by Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB), this meeting gathered 22 experts in a global effort to create more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient digital metropolises, with outcomes adding to the guidelines.

3. Figures and statistics

3.1 Overall Consultation Process

A total of 810 stakeholders contributed to the drafting of the International Guidelines. Feedback came from a wide range of diverse regions and stakeholder groups. Here in under, there are some considerations on the representation:

1. **Geographical representation:** Most participants were from Western Europe and Other States, as multiple in-person consultations were hosted in this region (academia, private sector and a regional Meeting).

2. **Stakeholder representation:** Some stakeholder consultations were organized online, which led to higher representation numbers of specific groups (e.g. academia, Local and Regional Governments, UN-Habitat internal consultation).

3. **Gender representation:** Gender representation was evenly distributed.

3.2 Global Expert Group Meetings

The selection of the 31 global experts was made to ensure geographical, competence and gender balance.

Table 1 Geographical Representation

Region	%
Africa	28%
WEOG	25%
Asia Pacific	22%
Latin America	16%
Eastern Europe	9%

Table 2 -Gender Representation

Gender	%
Male	56%
Female	44%

3.3 Regional Consultations

National government was highly represented as stakeholder group in the regional consultations. One additional regional validation consultation was held in Bratislava (Slovakia), for experts from WEOG.

Table 3 - Stakeholder groups

Organization type	%
National Government	54%
Local/Regional Gov.	20%
Academia	15%
Private Sector	10%
International Org.	2%

Table 4 -Geographical Representation

Region	%
WEOG	44%
Eastern Europe	34%
Asia Pacific	10%
Latin America	7%
Africa	5%

Table 5 - Gender Representation

Gender	%
Male	54%
Female	46%

3.4 Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

Stakeholder consultations with the possibility to join online (academia, local and regional governments, UN-Habitat), could generally accommodate more participants.

Table 6 Stakeholder type

Organization type	%
Academia	23%
Civil Society	9%
International Org.	7%
Local/Regional Gov.	21%
Private Sector	6%
UN- Habitat	27%
City Networks	3%
National government	4%

Table 7 - Geographical Representation

Region	%
Africa	16%
Asia Pacific	11%
Eastern Europe	2%
Global	34%
Latin America	8%
WEOG	29%

Table 8 - Gender Representation

Gender	%
Male	51%
Female	49%

3.5 Open Online Consultations

Stakeholder groups, namely academia, civil society and local and regional governments made most use of the opportunity to provide feedback to the online consultation, with most contributors representing WEOG region, followed by Africa and the Asia-Pacific Region. A total of 60 contributions were received and integrated into the guidelines.

Stakeholder groups

Organization type	%
Academia	18%
City Networks	2%
Civil Society	23%
Individual	10%
International Org.	10%
Local/Regional Gov.	20%
National Government	7%
Private Sector	10%

Geographical Representation

Region	%
Africa	17%
Asia Pacific	20%
Eastern Europe	7%
Latin America	10%
WEOG	47%

Geographical Representation

Gender	%
F	37%
M	63%

3.6 Ad-Hoc Consultations

Local and regional governments were by far the largest stakeholder group represented in ad-hoc consultations, organized by partners in parallel to conferences, leading up to 97 participants joining. As reflected in the figures of the geographical representation, several of these consultations were held in Western Europe, Canada or Brazil. One ad-hoc consultation was held in Nairobi, during the Africa Smart City Investment Summit, however figures are not available as registration was managed by the host.

Stakeholder groups

Organization type	%
Academia	15%
Local/Regional Gov.	61%
International org.	6%
Private Sector	3%
City Network	5%
UN-Habitat	4%
Civil Society	4%
National Government	1%

Geographical Representation

Region	%
Latin America	44%
WEOG	36%
Asia Pacific	9%
Africa	6%
Global	4%

Geographical Representation

Gender	%
Male	62%
Female	38%

4. Consultation Results

4.1 Global Expert Group Meetings

The Expert Working Group convened for 3 Expert Group Meetings, led to substantial improvements of the content of each draft, as well as specific direction on the definition of a people centred smart city, thematic areas, the principles and the actions of the guidelines.

Definition of people-centred smart cities:

- Digital technologies should enhance urban development, sustainability, and resilience while including territories and communities, not just vendor-driven solutions.

- Combine technological aspects with governance, sustainability, and citizen engagement, reinforcing collaboration, participation, and improved urban services.
- Each city should define its goals and needs with the people, building "with" not "for" them.
- Repurposing the term "smart" for inclusive cities to foster collaboration and human rights.

Recommendations on the structure of the guidelines:
- Ensure monitoring and evaluation along with implementation are mentioned in the document.
- Highlight the need to support national and local stakeholders in contextualizing the guidelines based on their needs – using a multi-tier approach that reflect different maturity levels.
- Move the process of developing the guidelines in the Annex of the document.
- Add examples of measure in the body of the guidelines.

Recommendations on the thematic areas and actors of the guidelines:
- Digital infrastructure and regulations should be reinforced but placed not at the beginning of the document.
- Financing is a core thematic area, along with sustainability and crisis management.
- Local authorities are essential for advancing the digital agenda, hence specific recommendations should be added addressing this stakeholder group.

4.2 Regional Consultations

A total of 3 online consultations took place online with one additional Regional Validation Meeting hosted in Bratislava, as per table above.

Similar priorities across regions:

- Empower communities to be active participants in policy development, not mere beneficiaries.
- Include clear instructions on the use of Artificial Intelligence.
- Need to increase financial support and exploring new financing models ensuring sustainable funding, for municipal digital policies, initiatives and infrastructure.
- Align local solutions for digital infrastructure with national strategic goals.
- Simplify the guidelines for easier understanding and usability by all stakeholders.
- Leverage on existing technologies, knowledge and successful business models and foster global collaboration in exchanging and transferring those.

Feedback on Implementation of the guidelines:

- Rural areas face significant challenges due to geographical constraints and inadequate infrastructure, making it harder to develop essential services and technology. Addressing these urban-rural gaps is crucial to ensure that rural regions can build the foundational infrastructure for equitable growth and access to services.
- A multi-tier approach is needed to accommodate various levels or readiness, starting with a baseline that defines basic minimum actions for cities, building up more complex initiatives.
- Develop cross-sectoral strategies linking smart city projects to economic, environmental, and social goals to highlight their value to governments.

4.3 Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

A total of 7 consultations were organized. While some recommendations were similar, many across the thematic areas of the guidelines also differed.

Shared priorities across stakeholders' groups:

- Ensure that the deployment of smart city technologies addresses real community needs.
- Promote public trust and technology adoption by fostering strong community relationships.
- Ensure low-barrier participation in digital infrastructures, digital society and economy while leveraging on existing solutions that can be replicated and scaled up (open-source).
- Ensure due process for the use of (emerging) technologies, with emphasis on legal, ethical, and procedural adherence, including data-protection.
- Shared and accessible data spaces can facilitate cross-city collaboration.
- Clarify the smart city definition, referring to the use of technologies in cities, and how this should drive systemic transformation across all sectors of sustainable urban planning.

4.4 Open Online Consultations

The open online consultation for external stakeholders led to revisions across thematic areas and the structure of the guidelines.

Identified gaps and suggested improvements regarding the content of the guidelines:

- *Ethics and emerging technologies*
  o Add a dedicated governance section on ethical AI, data and innovations and further reflect on data ethics, digital rights, and data ownership.
- *Ecosystem collaboration and roles*
  o Provide clarity on the role of startups within ecosystems and public-private partnerships.
  o Include community actors' role as users, catalysts, facilitators, moderators, designers.
  o Emphasize urban-rural linkages to foster collaboration leveraging technology and data sharing.
- *Resilience and crisis management*
  o Explore the role of technologies and data during natural and human-made disasters, such as climate change and conflicts.
  o Incorporate resilience and crisis management frameworks.
- *Capacity building and equity*
  o Address power and resource imbalances in developing countries, emphasizing the need for capacity building as a foundational step.
- Term and framing Smart City
  o 'Smart cities' should be avoided as too generic, while favoring specificity.

4.5 Ad-Hoc Consultations

Across various geographical locations, a series of 7 ad-hoc consultations were organized by trusted partners in the field of people-centred smart cities to address existing gaps related to climate, artificial intelligence, open data and data-governance. This led to several additional insights outlined below:

Additional contributions and gaps addressed regarding the content of the guidelines:

- Avoid creating new digital tools when effective ones are already in use by citizens.
- Recognize that technology cannot always be relied upon. There is substantial evidence of infrastructure failures during emergencies such as climate events, heatwaves, or flooding.
- Involve community leaders directly in discussions.
- The successful implementation of AI relies heavily on local domain expertise.
- Cities need to design evaluation procedures for AI with longer timespans in mind, so that cities can quickly adapt to changes in technologies and challenges.

5. Final Considerations

The input and feedback received through the series of consultations held highlighted the importance of collaboration across sectors and regions. The recommendations brought up similarities and shared priorities across stakeholders and regions. This signifies that consensus is possible while collaboration is needed in order to drive effective, flexible and impactful implementation of the guidelines to local contexts. However, it was also stressed the need for a tailored approach in implementing the principles and recommendations of the guidelines, in the respect of regional and local peculiarities and contextual challenges or opportunities. Experts globally called on UN-Habitat to support Member States in ensuring the guidelines do not remain an agreed paper, but are turned into practical actions through tools, learning programmes and other accompanying implementation mechanisms.

Moving forward, following the experts' suggestions, UN-Habitat could consider establishing a task force group that can support the Agency in the next phases, acting as advisors and champions as well as supporting the early adaptors of the guidelines. A dedicated platform for sharing best practices and knowledge should be created, leveraging as much as possible on existing networks. Cross-regional collaboration, through existing networks, will ensure coherence while allowing for regional adaptations.

Last, implementation should be tailored to each of the actors, sector, region and fostering as much as possible collaboration across all levels of government. This goes beyond a traditional approach that merely empowers institutions to implement the guidelines and will require community collaboration, continuous self-assessment, strong communication campaigns and structural financing that supports both short-term actions and long-term sustainability. The guidelines' success depends on equitable resource allocation and partnerships across sectors. By continuing engagement, fostering collaboration, and securing resources, the guidelines can drive resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban development.