



**UNITED
NATIONS**

HSP/OECPR.2025/5



UN-HABITAT

**United Nations
Human Settlements
Programme**

Distr.: General

4 March 2025

Original: English

**Committee of Permanent Representatives
to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme
Third open-ended meeting: preparations for the resumed
second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly
and midterm review**

Nairobi, 26–28 May 2025

Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Strategic plan of the United Nations Human Settlements
Programme: implementation of the strategic plan for the
period 2020–2025, including its midterm review**

Implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The implementation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 over the past four years has demonstrated that this framework is robust and resilient, serving as an effective road map for accelerating the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and advancing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Since the adoption of the strategic plan, UN-Habitat has strengthened its position as a global catalyst for sustainable urbanization, fostering collaboration, driving innovation and integrating normative and operational approaches to maximize impact.

2. Since 2020, UN-Habitat has operated in an increasingly urbanizing world, a trend that has continued throughout the period and is expected to persist over the next three decades. Approximately 90 per cent of urban growth has occurred in less developed regions, many of which face the challenges of unplanned expansion and housing inadequacy, which has also manifested in the proliferation of informal settlements and slums and homelessness, further exacerbating urban poverty and inequality. In contrast, many cities in other parts of the world have experienced population decline and negative growth, which present distinct challenges for urban planning and service provision.

3. The global housing crisis has intensified, as the demand for affordable and adequate housing has consistently outpaced supply, deepening inequality and vulnerability, particularly in urban areas. Between 2020 and 2024, the share of the global urban population living in slums increased from 22.7 per cent to 24.9 per cent. In absolute terms, the slum population grew by 191 million people. By the end of 2024, more than 1.6 billion people were living in inadequate housing, and more than 1.1 billion resided in slums and informal settlements. In addition, the number of international migrants, many of whom have settled in urban areas, reached 304 million, alongside 75.9 million internally displaced persons, further shaping the dynamics of urbanization and housing demand worldwide.

* HSP/OECPR.2025/1.

4. At the same time, cities and human settlements continue to create opportunities for advancing better quality of life for all. Generating the bulk of global and national gross domestic product and driving innovation and creative economic sectors, urban areas play a key role in the global economy. Better urban and territorial planning, management and governance can also address global challenges related to climate change and poverty. Furthermore, local and regional governments are key actors and stakeholders in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. In response, UN-Habitat has concentrated on supporting Member States and stakeholders in improving the planning, design and management of cities to tackle persistent challenges, while promoting pathways to transformative change through sustainable urban development and highlighting innovative policies and planning frameworks.

6. Since 2020, UN-Habitat has also navigated fiscal austerity while remaining steadfast in its support for cities and communities facing interconnected crises, including climate change, public health emergencies, and conflicts, and has worked alongside national and local governments to strengthen urban and territorial planning, management and finance, while assisting them in developing policies, plans and legislation that address urban inequalities, strengthen resilience and harness innovation and technology.

II. Key elements of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025

7. The strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 was approved by the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat Assembly) in 2019.

8. In 2020, UN-Habitat introduced its new organizational structure, which included the expansion of the Programme's catalytic function, the redefinition of collaboration and strategic partnerships, the role of regional offices and the strengthening of data-collection systems. All were tested and found to be robust and flexible in the face of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its consequences.

9. In 2021, the report of the Executive Director to the Executive Board on the recalibration of the strategic plan of UN-Habitat for the period 2020–2023 following the first meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat for a high-level midterm review (HSP/EB.2021/19) provided guidance on the way in which the implementation of strategic plan could be strengthened, on the basis of the "three-lens approach". The use of that three-lens approach helped UN-Habitat to rebalance investment and establish a better connection to available knowledge, as well as to its own assets and capacities. The proposed three lenses were as follows:

- (a) Ensuring that all new programming responded to new vulnerabilities and risks in cities;
- (b) Pursuing more integrated programming to adapt the function and form of cities to respond to current and future crises in terms of resilience and climate change;
- (c) Creating conditions for all programmes to support long-term socioeconomic urban recovery that helped to overcome spatial inequality and addressed the climate emergency.

10. The midterm review of the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 was prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/239, in which the Assembly welcomed the report of the Open-ended Working Group established by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/226.

11. In response to the challenges and opportunities identified in the midterm review, and to ensure policy coherence by aligning its planning cycles with the United Nations development system and management reforms, in particular the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the UN-Habitat Assembly, at its second session, approved the extension of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 until 2025, allowing for further consolidation of the progress achieved and a better alignment with global strategic priorities for sustainable urban development.

12. The second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, convened under the theme "A sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in times of global crises", presented an opportunity to examine the role of enhanced multilateralism in furthering key policy priorities and associated enablers of sustainable urbanization. Connecting the multilateral system to local action can enhance the ownership, effective implementation and sustainability of policies at the national and global levels and is thus urgent. Through the adoption of resolutions on transforming informal settlements and slums, on adequate housing for all, on accelerating the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, on the

interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience, and on developing people-centred smart city guidelines, Member States demonstrated their collective resolve to revitalize sustainable urban development and provided further guidance to inform the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025.

13. The UN-Habitat Assembly also mandated UN-Habitat to begin preparations for the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029.

14. The implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 was further informed by the high-level meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda convened by the President of the General Assembly in 2022. The high-level meeting highlighted selected policy priorities that aligned with and strengthened the four domains of change of the strategic plan. That allowed UN-Habitat to focus its activities for achieving greater impact in priority areas, creating better integrated solutions as well as co-benefits across the outcome areas of the strategic plan. The selected policy priorities were as follows:

(a) Universal access to adequate housing, anchored in domain of change 1, for supporting the reduction of poverty and inequality, and strengthened inclusive, planned and sustainable urbanization;

(b) Urban and local climate and biodiversity action, anchored in domain of change 3, to reach vulnerable groups in informal settlements, improve multilevel governance and integrate sustainable urban development in national climate action strategies;

(c) Recognizing cities, local governments and urban stakeholders as front-line actors to prevent and respond to crises and contribute to sustaining peace, anchored in domain of change 4;

(d) Localization and local finance, anchored in domain of change 2, as selected key drivers or means of implementation for all three policy priorities.

15. Throughout the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025, the “Think, do, share” approach has been a key part of the UN-Habitat strategy for increasing the effectiveness of implementation of the strategic plan. Within this framework, UN-Habitat has generated research, data and policy guidance to shape sustainable urban development, providing leadership on urban trends and challenges (“think”), implemented projects and innovative urban solutions, promoting inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities (“do”) and acted as a facilitator of partnerships and knowledge, fostering global cooperation and the exchange of best practices (“share”).

III. Key challenges and opportunities of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025

16. In 2023 and 2024, the Office of Internal Oversight Services conducted a midterm assessment of the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 and evaluated its relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and coherence.

17. The Office confirmed the strategic plan’s relevance to and impact on policies, government capacities and community well-being, with notable contributions in Brazil, Egypt, Iraq, Kenya, Mozambique and the Philippines, among other countries. The evaluation concluded that the strategic plan set ambitious goals, provided a relevant and coherent vision to guide the work of UN-Habitat and served as a valuable programming and advocacy tool. The evaluation also observed significant contributions by UN-Habitat to improving the lives of beneficiaries and strengthening the capacities of government counterparts, noting positive changes in policies and capacities at the local and national government levels.

18. The evaluation also identified areas for improvement, recommending that the following be strengthened: (a) delivery architecture and accountability for strategic plan implementation; (b) localization and results management framework; (c) communication strategy and corporate messaging on impact, and inter-agency collaboration towards advancing the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development; (d) field operations; (e) long-term sustainability of results; and (f) leveraging of the mandate and expertise of UN-Habitat in addressing critical urban data and knowledge gaps.

19. In 2024, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network assessed UN-Habitat as part of its efforts to evaluate multilateral organizations and enhance their effectiveness and efficiency. The Network, which represents major donors providing multilateral assistance, aims to support internal reforms and change initiatives, assist in strategic transformation efforts and help to shape standards and organizational best practices.

20. In its assessment, the Network recognized the balance between the normative and operational work of UN-Habitat as a defining characteristic of its operating model. The Network also highlighted the consistently strong demand for operational support, as reflected in the levels of earmarked contributions at the country level. The report also revealed that domains of change 1 and 2 in the strategic plan formed the core of UN-Habitat's work in sustainable urbanization and housing, while domains of change 3 and 4 articulated its contributions to contemporary challenges, such as climate change and humanitarian crises related to sustainable urbanization. The report also noted that UN-Habitat demonstrated strong engagement with global, national and city partners, reflecting its commitment and effective processes for collaborative efforts in sustainable urbanization, and highlighted the importance of the strategic plan enablers (monitoring and knowledge, innovation, advocacy, communication and outreach, partnerships, capacity-building, and systems and processes), which were recognized throughout UN-Habitat as important drivers of performance at the global, regional and country levels.

IV. Key achievements in the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025

21. Over the past four years, significant results have been achieved across the domains of change and the outcome areas of the strategic plan.

22. In reducing spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum, UN-Habitat has made measurable progress. In relation to the increased and secure access to land and adequate and affordable housing, UN-Habitat contributed to improving the living conditions of 17.6 million urban dwellers (43 per cent of people who have moved out of slum-like conditions during the period in question), while 46 partner cities have implemented innovative financing partnerships to support slum upgrading and low-cost housing. Fifty-six countries have achieved improvements, both in relative and absolute terms, benefiting the 41.2 million people who have transitioned out of slum-like conditions. Among the 32 countries receiving UN-Habitat assistance for housing programmes or policies, 62 per cent have successfully reduced the prevalence of slums. In addition, at least 466,000 households have had their secure tenure rights to land documented in project locations, while 40 cities actively promoted and implemented strategies, tools and approaches to enhance secure land tenure rights.

23. Regarding the impact of efforts aimed at increasing and ensuring equal access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space, it is important to highlight the fact that more than 3.9 million people in informal settlements gained access to urban basic services, while 5.2 million people benefited from basic waste collection services. Further, through the Waste-wise Cities Programme, 38 cities improved municipal solid waste management, which had an impact on the lives of 5.2 million people. The Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance has improved the efficiency of 53 partner utilities in developing countries, serving 53 million people with improved water and sanitation services. In addition, 31 cities received support for increasing the proportion of municipal solid waste processed by recovery facilities, promoting more sustainable waste management practices.

24. With regard to enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions, more than 2.93 million people in 104 cities now have access to 152 safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces designed and upgraded through the UN-Habitat Global Public Space Programme.

25. In addition, 5.7 million people are living in areas covered by a statutory plan in partner cities. Furthermore, 74 cities have institutionalized mechanisms for inclusive civil society participation in urban planning and management, while 64 countries have received support at various stages of national urban policy development. Meanwhile, 15 voluntary local reviews have been carried out by local and regional governments, making for a total of 46 such reviews published worldwide.

26. In support of sustainable mobility, eight countries and cities have developed sustainable urban mobility plans, and 425,000 people now have access to public transport and sustainable mobility options as a result of UN-Habitat initiatives.

27. In relation to the expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations, 20 cities are now implementing pilot strategies, plans and projects that inform the development of the international guidelines on people-centred smart cities.

28. As for strengthened climate action and improved urban environment, 129 countries, with support from UN-Habitat, have enhanced urban content in national and global climate action frameworks and instruments, and more than 250 climate change action priorities were identified at the Innovate4Cities Conference; if addressed, those priorities can accelerate and expand urban action

implementation to the speed and scale needed to meet the Paris Agreement goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. In addition, 37 cities were supported in implementing conservation, management and sustainable use approaches, such as nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, while 30 integrated urban climate action plans focusing on the most vulnerable communities were initiated.

30. Regarding effective urban crisis prevention and response, UN-Habitat has supported 12 countries in integrating the concerns of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities into their urban planning and management, while seven countries have adopted context-specific responses to urban migration and displacement and facilitated participatory and co-creation processes towards the enhanced integration of refugees, migrants and vulnerable host communities at the neighbourhood level.

31. In addition, 89 cities continue to implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Moreover, UN-Habitat has supported the development of 32 city resilience frameworks for action in sub-Saharan Africa, and two settlements with displaced populations have adopted an integrated, participatory urban planning and inclusive development approach.

32. In addition, UN-Habitat has played a pivotal role in scaling the New Urban Agenda and in supporting key multilateral processes related to sustainable urban development. The 2022 quadrennial report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, developed in consultation with more than 40 partners, was presented during the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to assess progress in the implementation of the Agenda. A total of 83 Member States committed to accelerating implementation by advancing actions related to adequate housing with basic services and inclusive urban planning; climate mitigation and adaptation and environmental sustainability; urban crisis reduction and recovery; multilevel governance and the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals; and sustainable financing for infrastructure and urban basic services.

33. The interconnection between urbanization and climate change has also gained prominence. At the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in 2023, UN-Habitat and its partners mobilized a coalition to place the urban agenda at the forefront of climate negotiations. As part of those efforts, UN-Habitat hosted the second Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change, which attracted more than 1,000 participants, including 60 ministers and deputy ministers, mayors and representatives of multilateral development banks and community organizations. During the Conference, UN-Habitat co-chaired the inaugural Local Climate Action Summit, emphasizing the critical role of multilevel climate action. The Summit culminated in the launch of the Coalition for High-Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action pledge, which was signed by 71 national Governments that committed to integrating multilevel action into the outcomes of the Conference and collaborating with non-State actors for the 2025 revision of nationally determined contributions. In addition, the Secretary-General of the United Nations convened the inaugural meeting of the Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments.

34. In 2024, two major events – the United Nations Summit of the Future and the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum – were instrumental in shaping the work of UN-Habitat throughout the remainder of the implementation period for the strategic plan. The Pact for the Future recognized cities and local governments as key drivers of sustainable development, climate action and social inclusion, and called for greater investment in resilient infrastructure, affordable housing and equitable public services, while emphasizing multilevel governance, public-private partnerships and data-driven policymaking to accelerate sustainable urbanization.

35. The twelfth session of the World Urban Forum, co-organized by UN-Habitat and the Government of Egypt, was the largest and most inclusive in its history. Held in Cairo, the Forum drew more than 24,000 participants from 182 countries, hosted a total of 738 activities and saw high-level attendance by 60 ministers and 45 deputy ministers. The Forum delivered a strong call to action on the critical role of local action and the importance of local and regional governments in achieving sustainable cities and communities, as envisioned in the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11. As a strategic platform, it facilitated impactful collaborations across sectors, including within the United Nations system, to address the complex challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

36. Throughout the period, UN-Habitat, in its catalytic role as a knowledge hub and convener of partners, has actively advanced advocacy, communication and outreach efforts to mobilize broad-

based support for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. It has also strengthened stakeholder engagement and collaboration with knowledge centres to further leverage advocacy and expertise. The annual reports prepared in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 included impact stories, which complemented the monitoring of and reporting on the strategic plan through a qualitative approach.

37. UN-Habitat has also monitored and reported on global trends, providing evidence-based insights for policymaking. Twenty-five partners collaborated with UN-Habitat to develop the Global Urban Monitoring Framework, which was endorsed by the Statistical Commission as part of the harmonized United Nations system-wide strategy for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. Since the endorsement of the Framework in 2022, 96 cities in 56 countries have interacted and produced global Sustainable Development Goal performance data using new categories of city and urban and rural definitions developed by UN-Habitat.

V. Lessons learned and the way forward

38. These achievements highlight the continued relevance and impact of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025, reinforcing its role as a key instrument for promoting sustainable urban development. Despite a challenging global context, the strategic plan has remained a robust road map for advancing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and has played a critical role in addressing conflict and climate emergencies, assisting in human settlements management in crises and supporting sustainable recovery from a global pandemic. Throughout its implementation to date, the strategic plan has also enabled UN-Habitat to drive integrated and innovative urban solutions, expand strategic partnerships and deliver targeted interventions.

39. Several key elements of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 have also proved to be effective and should be maintained and further strengthened in future strategic planning efforts. For example, the transition to an outcome-oriented framework has significantly improved the ability of UN-Habitat to articulate how the New Urban Agenda contributes to accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It has also enhanced the value added by UN-Habitat in implementing global agendas related to climate change, biodiversity, and crisis prevention and response.

40. The strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 has fostered greater corporate coherence and integration, ensuring a collective focus on higher-level impact. By providing a structured framework, it has facilitated better alignment between normative and operational work, reinforcing the ability of UN-Habitat to deliver comprehensive urban development solutions. The domains of change and their respective outcomes, along with the systems established to guide project development, have enabled more integrated programming. This is evidenced by the fact that more than 40 per cent of UN-Habitat projects contribute to outcomes spanning at least three domains of change. The organization's work should not be perceived as operating in silos, but rather as a means of delivering impact across multiple global agendas.

41. The strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 has also served as a framework for better integration of normative and operational work. The alignment between the strategic plan and the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development, the results areas of which mirror the domains of change, has enabled the establishment of stronger strategic partnerships both within and beyond the United Nations system. This has led to greater recognition of the role of UN-Habitat and increasing demand for its expertise and contributions to system-wide efforts, particularly in relation to climate action, migration and displacement.

42. Among the areas for improvement and enhancement of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025, there is broad consensus on the need for greater focus and prioritization at the outcome level. While the strategic plan captures all key aspects of the work of UN-Habitat, it lacks a clear hierarchy of priorities.

43. Throughout the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 to date, it has also become evident that a more precise identification and articulation of global trends would have further enhanced the ability of UN-Habitat to support national and local governments in addressing urban challenges. Strengthening this alignment will be essential in the next strategic cycle to help the organization sharpen its focus and measure the impact of its work more effectively.

44. In addition, clearer accountability mechanisms will be required across all levels of the organization, ensuring alignment with the subprogrammes used to develop the annual work programme and budget. Such mechanisms should be complemented by a more focused and adaptable results framework and an enhanced knowledge management system, which would enable greater responsiveness and effectiveness in achieving the UN-Habitat mission.

45. Finally, to enhance effectiveness, the results framework and knowledge management systems should be more focused and agile, ensuring that UN-Habitat remains responsive to emerging urban challenges while maintaining its strong commitment to measurable and lasting impact.

46. Building on the results and findings emerging from the strategic plan for the period 2020–2025, UN-Habitat is working to ensure that the development of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 is aligned with these lessons, ensuring a continued outcome-driven approach reinforced by more focused priorities that maximize impact. In this sense, the draft strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 proposes a simpler structure with clearer language and will provide clear corporate guidance on how its objectives can be implemented effectively at the global, regional, national and subnational levels, with a stronger translation into local and country-level action.
