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Normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, including reporting on the programmatic activities of UN-Habitat and the implementation of subprogrammes, flagship programmes and technical cooperation activities and the engagement of UN-Habitat in countries, territories and areas affected by conflict and disaster.

UN-Habitat's 2020-2025 flagship programmes **

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The five flagship programmes were established under the [UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020–2025](#), as the primary vehicles to deliver transformative impact on new areas of work across the Strategic Plan's four Domains of Change (DoC). Collectively, the flagships embody an integrated approach to sustainable urbanization and contribute directly to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda. The flagship programmes have served as incubators for new integrated programming, bridging normative and operational work, and facilitating learning across regions and thematic areas.
2. This final report consolidates the achievements and lessons learned under the current Strategic Plan and provides substantive inputs for the implementation of the new Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

II. Flagship programmes achievements

Flagship Programme 1: Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities

1. Flagship programme 1 aimed to maximize the transformative potential of urban regeneration to reduce socio-spatial inequalities, transforming urban areas into connected, diverse and vibrant neighbourhoods, serving as engines of development for their cities and surrounding regions, as set out in DoC 1. This programme was grounded in approaches that foster human rights and increased inclusive socio-economic transformations.
2. Flagship programme 1 has yielded impactful results, including for knowledge production and data exchange;

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network and capacity development; and technical assistance. It helped advance a common understanding of the concept of urban regeneration - centred on inclusion and resilience — and issued implementation guidelines. Key achievements have included:

- **Operational support**, delivered in 51 cities, 8 countries in the Middle East and North Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean regions, including to Riyadh through the *Central Riyadh Urban Regeneration project*, to Abu Dhabi for the development of its *Capital Plan*, Nairobi through the *Nairobi River Regeneration Initiative*; and to cities in Jordan, Brazil, Egypt and Ghana to advance the *Sport for Sustainable Urban Development Initiative*, which UN-Habitat co-leads with the International Olympic Committee.
 - **Partnerships**, including the French Association for Urban Renewal, the Basque government, Expo Dubai, Microsoft and Bocconi University. These partnerships enabled multiple outcomes including, with Bocconi University, the consolidation of best practices for the [SUR Atlas](#), an open-source repository of exemplary sustainable urban regeneration projects.
 - Numerous **knowledge products** and tools developed, including the [Urban Regeneration and Viruses](#), [Spatial Inclusion Regional Trends](#), and [Towards Inclusive Urban Futures](#) reports; a clarification note on *Urban Regeneration for Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities*; and a series of position papers demonstrating the relevance of inclusive urban regeneration for SDG localization, climate resilience, nature-based solutions, and slum upgrading.
 - Global engagement and **capacity-building** support, through the development of a global training on urban regeneration (delivered in Viet Nam and Bahrain), the creation of a *Mega-Events Network* to share best practices among cities; and an Expert Group Meeting hosted in Bilbao, Spain.
3. The knowledge gained is mainstreamed into UN-Habitat's work on public spaces, which can be catalytic for urban regeneration. UN-Habitat, through its Regional Office for the Arab States and together with local partners (e.g., Expo Dubai, Riyadh Expo 2030), will also continue to build on the legacy of the programme, within the framework of the Mega-Events Global Initiative.

Flagship Programme 2: People Centered Smart Cities

4. Flagship programme 2 was designed to leverage digital transitions to enhance the shared prosperity of cities and regions, in alignment with DoC 2. Digital transitions are a vehicle for inclusion, improved service delivery, and the realization of human rights. Operating through multi-level governance, the programme supported national and local governments in developing, procuring, and using digital technologies in ethical and effective ways, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind.
5. Flagship programme 2 has delivered results along three pathways of change: digital policy transformation, financing for digital urban innovation, and digital empowerment and capacity building. Key achievements have included:
- **Operational results** and technical advice provided to national, regional and local governments, including through the [United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities](#) (UNITAC). This included the development of digital tools and pilot initiatives in Namibia, Ukraine, Bangladesh, Brazil, South Africa, Botswana, Somalia. UN-Habitat's support placed people at the centre of digital strategies and technology solutions and enabled the drafting of smart cities strategies and smart urban plans in over 40 cities, with a focus on the Global South, the adoption of methods and frameworks to assess and address the urban digital divide as well as guidance to uphold digital human rights in cities.
 - i. Operational and technical assistance was delivered in 11 African cities through the [ASToN Network](#), strengthening digital transformation strategies and governance frameworks.
 - ii. In [Namibia](#), UNITAC supported five towns (Windhoek, Rehoboth, Rundu, Helao Nafidi, and Opuwo) to apply data-driven approaches and develop smart city strategies and governance models addressing inequality, informing inclusive urban policies, and leveraging innovation for better living conditions.
 - iii. Policy advisory support was provided to [European cities](#) (Dublin, Brussels, Sofia and Tirana) to foster digital human rights into their normative frameworks, and through self-assessment and diagnostic tools.
 - iv. In [Latin America, three cities](#) — Niterói (Brazil), Mexico City (Mexico), and Medellín (Colombia) — received tailored technical support on digital transformation and smart urban planning to enhance transparency, inclusion, and innovation in city management. Additionally, in Brazil, UNITAC has

applied the [AOVI participatory tool](#) in 12 regional workshops.

- v. Through UNITAC, the [Building Establisher Automated Mapper \(BEAM\)](#), a machine learning powered tool, was deployed in two cities in South Africa (eThekweni and Cape Town) and eight cities in Latin America (Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa, Belize City, San Salvador, Santo Domingo, San José, Managua, Panama City) within 72 hours., supporting evidence-based decision-making to improve access to adequate housing and basic urban services.
 - vi. In [Hargeisa](#), Somalia, UNITAC has developed the [Dhaamiye tool](#) with the Hargeisa Water Agency to improve water access and water management in informal settlements. The tool connects vulnerable communities without access to pipe water to certified vendors via mobile application.
 - vii. [In Ukraine, UNITAC has supported four municipalities](#) (Makariv, Irpin, Drohobych and Kamianets-Podilskyi) with digital tools and data platforms to build back better. The [Urban Recovery Planning System](#) enhances the digital capacity of local authorities by visualizing and analyzing over 45 datasets, complementing urban recovery plans, supported by UN-Habitat.
 - viii. In Bangladesh, UNITAC provided capacity development to four municipalities (Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Charchat, and Chapainawabganj) for their digital transformation, offering technical advice on challenge-driven innovation and the use of digital tools for climate-smart urban development.
- **Data-specific support**, through the development of data platforms and inclusive data governance, policies, standards and architectures that enable ethical collection, sharing, and use.
 - **Capacity-building and global advocacy**, advancing digital human rights, inclusion and governance working together with a wide network of partners including the [Cities Coalition for Digital Rights](#), UCLG, Eurocities and others. Capacity building activities included support towards people-centred smart city strategies, inclusive data systems, digital rights, divide diagnostics and digital public participation.
 - **Normative guidance**, through the adoption of [resolution 2/1](#), the Assembly mandated the development of [International Guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities](#). The Guidelines built on the principles, partnerships and expertise gained through the flagship programme and drew from the [People-Centred Smart Cities Playbooks](#), including the [World Smart Cities Outlook 2024](#), as well as collaboration frameworks such as the United for Smart and Sustainable Cities (U4SSC), the Global Alliance of Mayors on Digital Cooperation (with the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology) and others. No consensus was reached on the draft Guidelines at the resumed UN-Habitat Assembly (May 2025).
6. The flagship programme successfully mainstreamed people-centred digitalization in policy dialogues and planning processes. It advanced inclusive data governance in partner cities and countries and strengthened institutional capacity through targeted training and advisory support. Strategic partnerships expanded across UN agencies and city networks, creating a coherent platform for collective action on digital inclusion.
 7. Looking ahead, the lessons learned from the Programme and principles and substantive elements of the draft *International Guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities* can continue to guide digitalization efforts through technical support at the local and national levels, upon request of national and local governments.

Flagship Programme 3: RISE-UP: Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor

8. Flagship programme 3 has served as UN-Habitat's primary vehicle to implement DoC 3: strengthened climate action and improved urban environment. The programme focused on enabling the effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change, with particular attention to vulnerable communities.
9. Its main achievement has been to successfully expand UN-Habitat's normative leadership on urban climate action while delivering tangible support to advance community resilience at the local level. The impact of the flagship programme can also be measured against its significant climate finance mobilization and effective mainstreaming of pro-poor urban climate resilience into city-level and national frameworks. This work was carried out in alignment with [UN-Habitat Assembly resolution 2/5](#) and feeding into the operationalization of the SURGE initiative (Executive Board decision 2024/3). Key achievements have included:
 - **Over USD 150 million mobilized**, channeled directly to cities and communities, reducing financing barriers for local governments and demonstrating that resilience investments can be bankable and attractive to major funds (Adaptation Fund, GCF, ADB, IKI, and bilateral donors).
 - **Operational support delivered to 28 countries** with emphasis on LDCs and SIDS. Specific support,

regarding the implementation of [multilayered vulnerability assessments](#) and *Urban Climate Resilience Action Plans*, was provided for 23 cities, across 14 countries – Bolivia, Colombia, Comoros, Fiji, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Tunisia.

- **Global normative work on urban climate action**, through contributions to the IPCC Special Report on Cities, the [Innovate4Cities](#) conferences, the urban heat and climate-crisis agendas, and UN-Habitat’s Nationally determined contributions (NDC) guidance and support.
 - **Partnerships and collaborations** with the Building Climate Resilience for the Urban Poor (BCRUP) initiative launched at the 2019 Climate Action Summit by Kenya and Türkiye; the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation (urban heat officers); UNEP under the Greener Cities Partnership, GCoM, and others under the SURGe umbrella.
10. The “RISE UP” flagship programme has demonstrated that large-scale, pro-poor urban resilience can be both bankable and scalable. It also validated the potential for UN-Habitat’s normative and operational workstreams to be mutually reinforcing, highlighting the importance of bridging the gap between local knowledge and global policy and showcasing how grassroots resilience initiatives can meaningfully inform global processes such as COP, NDC development, and Innovate4Cities. Continued attention is required to cross-cutting issues such as community resilience, urban heat, informal settlements, biodiversity loss, and the links between poverty and climate risk.
11. Moving forward, RISE UP’s outcomes will be embedded in the operationalization of the SURGe initiative, as mandated by Executive Board decision 2024/3. This provides a platform to scale up multilevel action, foster synergies with CHAMP and other coalitions, and mobilize sustained donor contributions for local governments and vulnerable communities. RISE UP will also continue to serve as a vehicle for delivering climate and urban programming through UN-Habitat’s Regional and Country Offices, strengthening capacities to leverage climate finance for local communities. In its next phase, RISE UP will continue to position UN-Habitat as a central actor in delivering urban climate resilience at scale, in line with UNHA resolution 2/5 and the 2030 Agenda.

Flagship Programme 4: Inclusive Cities: Enhancing the Positive Impacts of Urban Migration

12. Flagship programme 4 was UN-Habitat’s main response to DoC 4: effective urban crisis prevention and response. The programme addressed migration and displacement in cities by developing normative guidance, strengthening government capacities, and shaping integrated solutions at local levels. It offered scalable programmatic approaches in displacement-affected contexts, pivoting quicker from humanitarian relief to sustainable urban development.
13. This flagship programme strengthened UN-Habitat’s normative leadership on the urban dimensions of displacement, integrating urban planning and strengthening the role of local governments as part of the Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and advancing a system-wide, development-oriented approach to urban displacement and migration. Key achievements include:
- **Operational support**, including in:
 - i. Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine through [Urban Recovery Frameworks](#), supporting participatory planning and resilience building.
 - ii. Colombia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Mozambique and Somalia (through the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund) to inform national policies and plans and strengthen the capacity of local actors.
 - iii. Mali and Niger to develop strategic action plans applying territorial approaches to displacement.
 - iv. Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan and Mauritania to support area-based planning for refugees and hosts and improve land governance and local government capacities.
 - v. Central America to generate human mobility profiles and foster socioeconomic and territorial integration.
 - vi. Myanmar, Nepal and the Philippines to advance post-disaster recovery, restoring services, housing and resilience infrastructure.
 - **Advancing global knowledge and normative positioning**, UN-Habitat developed an *Institutional Plan on Internal Displacement*, ensuring a whole of house approach, and a [Global Framework Towards](#)

[Inclusive Solutions to Urban Internal Displacement](#), aligned with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Existing tools were also updated to mainstream as migration and displacement into urban planning and public space design. UN-Habitat also strengthened its contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees, co-leading with Ethiopia a pledge on climate-resilient sustainable human settlements, advancing sustainable responses to refugee situations, bridging humanitarian response with long-term development planning and multi-scalar territorial approaches.

- **Strengthening partnerships**, UN-Habitat reinforced its role as a reference on the urban dimensions of displacement and migration, including with:
 - i. Other UN agencies, IFIs and global networks such as the Global Alliance on Urban Crises, the UN Network on Migration and the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD);
 - ii. The Office of the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Solutions to Internal Displacement and the follow up mechanisms of the Solutions Hub and Working Group;
 - iii. UNHCR and the World Bank, advancing the implementation of the pledge on climate-resilient sustainable human settlements in a range of countries in Africa
 - iv. JIPS and IIED to advance urban profiling and overall urban displacement data.

14. Going forward, the knowledge gained, tools developed and strengthened partnerships are being translated into more impactful programming at country level. Knowledge and experience are further shared through an active community of practice. Additional surge capacity to support country operations and UNCT's urban solutions to displacement is being developed.

Flagship Programme 5: Sustainable Development Goals Cities

15. Flagship programme 5 was created to help cities localizing the SDGs through actionable tools that guide local development. Anchored in three core tracks — data, planning, and investment — SDG Cities guided local governments through a holistic approach that strengthened their capacities to generate and analyze data, make evidence-based decisions, and channel investments where they can drive the greatest impact. SDG Cities was designed to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a cross-cutting manner.
16. The flagship programme served as a vehicle to bring together UN-Habitat's services under a coherent and demand-driven framework — tailoring support to cities. The key achievements include:
 - **Operational support** to over 100 cities, including in:
 - i. Ghana, working with the national government to support the development of SDG-aligned and high-impact projects.
 - ii. Portugal, with the development of a National Municipal Development Fund aimed at leveraging EUR 300 million in SDG investments at the local level. The Fund builds on the experience of Mafra and six other cities that adopted the SDG Cities approach to inform their development planning and monitoring processes.
 - iii. Costa Rica, where SDG Cities supported 53 municipalities through the SDG Canton Network to integrate the SDGs as a tool for investment planning.
 - iv. Jordan, with the development of [Action-Oriented Voluntary Local Reviews](#) (VLR) in the cities of Amman and Irbid— contributing to the government's efforts to strengthen effective multilevel governance and policy coherence.
 - v. Finland, where SDG Cities helped shaping a whole-of-government approach to SDG localization. Five cities produced VLRs which were integrated in Finland's VNR presented at HLPF 2025. The same cities engaged in city-to-city twinning involving Tanzanian peers – Mwanza and Zanzibar.
 - **Normative guidance**, provided by SDG Cities through 15 guidelines, over 20 tools, and support 46 Voluntary Local Reviews — advancing accessible innovation.
 - Through **partnerships**, such as with the *International Olympic Committee (IOC)*, to support cities in Brazil, Egypt, Ghana, and Jordan to use sport as a driver of catalytic projects linking infrastructure development with territorial social and economic transformation.
 - **SDG Cities Global Community** was launched in 2024, engaging more than 180 cities from 45 countries - building partnerships and exchanging solutions. The Community meets annually for the SDG Cities

17. Recognized as one of the targets of the Local2030 High Impact Initiative, SDG Cities is embedded in the Local2030 Coalition. Therefore, SDG Cities will continue to serve local authorities worldwide, as a key implementation mechanism of the Local2030 Coalition, and in alignment with the priorities established by the 2026-2029 strategic plan. The programme will continue to operationalize the Coalition's principles and tools, making multilevel, multi-stakeholders, and integrated development a reality for local communities.

III. Main takeaways

18. The implementation of the five flagship programmes during 2020–2025 confirmed their value as mechanisms for integrating UN-Habitat's normative and operational work, promoting new integrated programmatic approaches in new areas of work and advancing the Strategic Plan. The flexibility in design of the flagships helped to tailor them to their objectives, their global and operational footprint and funding realities.
 19. The flagship programmes strengthened collaboration across divisions and regions, improved coordination among thematic areas, and expanded partnerships with governments, international organizations, academia, and the private sector. It also enhanced efficiency in the development of joint initiatives and resource mobilization efforts. Importantly, the programmes generated a substantial body of technical materials, methodologies, and tools that remain available to support any country wishing to apply them, ensuring the long-term value of the investments made. The results and lessons learned are being integrated into the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2026–2029.
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