

## Many cities lack plans to guide digitalization

Nairobi/Barcelona, November 15, 2022 – Cities are increasingly using digital technologies for the delivery of basic services such as transportation, energy, public lighting, waste management, healthcare, and many others. This ongoing digital transformation provides new opportunities but also creates challenges to establish the so-called *smart city initiatives*.

A dedicated smart city unit for the coordination and implementation of smart city initiatives is common in many cities and data-driven decision-making plays a central role, especially in higher-income economies. However, the implementation and application of legal frameworks and regulations specific to smart city initiatives is a complex task for many municipalities worldwide. Many local governments lack an innovation-oriented mindset and the competencies required to manage an effective digital transformation. Moreover, over two thirds of low-income countries do not have a national policy to guide smart city initiatives.

These are some of the main findings from a [new report](#) published today and produced jointly by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme ([UN-Habitat](#)), the Development Bank of Latin America ([CAF](#)), [Edinburgh Napier University](#), and Tallinn University of Technology ([TalTech](#)).

The [Global Review of Smart City Governance Practices](#) is the first-ever report to examine how smart city governance is interpreted and managed across regions of the world. It brings together experience from 250 cities to provide key strategic recommendations for local governments as they plan, implement and sustain smart city initiatives.

*“I believe local governments have an important role to play in the governance of smart cities and in countering the challenges and risks of rising digitalization in public service delivery and implications such as digital divide, digital inclusion, and social equity,”* said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

*“At the intersection between digital technology and urban development lies an opportunity for more sustainable living conditions in urban communities. This report offers clear advice on how to realise this potential in an inclusive and sustainable manner, with evidence-based recommendations that can inform any efforts to transform smart city technologies into a force for more sustainable urban futures,”* said Luca Mora, Professor of Urban Innovation and Director of the Urban Innovation Policy Lab at Edinburgh Napier University.

*“In Latin America and the Caribbean, the most urbanized developing region on the planet, smart city management is a key element in improving people’s lives. With this work, we hope to contribute to the debate on issues of inclusive urban development and to the dissemination of innovative initiatives that seek to strengthen the intelligent management of cities,”* said Mr. Antonio Silveira, Physical Infrastructure and Digital Transformation Manager at CAF, the Development Bank of Latin America.

Further facts and figures highlighted in the report include:

- More than two thirds of cities in low-income countries lack national policies to guide smart city initiatives.
- 64% of African cities cite lack of skills as a key factor that constrains their smart city initiatives compared to cities in other continents.
- The long-term sustainability of smart city initiatives has been highlighted as a key concern worldwide, with a higher incidence in Africa and North America.
- Public procurement regulations and tight bureaucratic control remain an obstacle in the engagement of external partners in smart city initiatives, particularly in Latin America and North America.
- It is difficult for municipal governments worldwide to ensure the active participation of residents in smart city initiatives. This raises concerns regarding efforts to make smart cities more people-centric.

The [Global Review of Smart City Governance Practices](#) will be launched during a side event at the 2022 Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona on 15 November.

#### **About UN-Habitat**

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the United Nations entity responsible for sustainable urbanization. It has programmes in over 90 countries that support policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns

#### **About Edinburgh Napier University**

It is one of the top public universities in Scotland. As part of its mission, the University aims to provide urban development actors worldwide with the knowledge required to effectively manage smart city initiatives and to ensure that digital innovation becomes an instrument for boosting sustainable development. To support this effort, Edinburgh Napier University has created the Urban Innovation Policy Lab ([Unity Lab](#)). With multidisciplinary research that unites urban science to technology and innovation studies, the Unity Lab conducts international research activities that have been contributing to advancing theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of urban innovation, in particular smart city transitions.

#### **About CAF**

The Development Bank of Latin America, has the mission to promote sustainable development and regional integration by financing projects in the public and private sectors, and providing technical cooperation and other specialized services. Established in 1970 currently with 20 member countries -18 in Latin America and the Caribbean with Spain and Portugal - and 13 private banks, CAF is one of the main sources of multilateral financing and an important generator of knowledge for the region.

#### **About TalTech**

It is the only flagship in engineering and IT science and education in Estonia, providing higher education at all levels in engineering and technology, information technology, economics, science, and maritime. TalTech's mission is to be a promoter of science,

technology, and innovation and a leading provider of engineering and economic education in Estonia.

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