



Transforming Global Urban Data

2023-2029



BACKGROUND

Humanity's present and future is urban. We live in an urban world and now is the time for leaders to think, plan and act urban. The 2030 Agenda set out a vision of common global goals that for the first time inextricably linked humanity's future to the fate of cities and human settlements. For millennia, the economic and political transformation of societies has gone hand in hand with the evolution of cities and the rise of urbanization. Creating the conditions for environmentally sustainable, economically prosperous, and socially equitable and just cities and human settlements is of paramount importance for present and future generations. Yet, still today, the gaps in the availability of urban data remains critically significant. This represents a major risk to the design and execution of effective policy interventions and investments towards sustainable urbanization. The need for scaling up the availability, quality and systematic use of urban data is clear.

UN-Habitat is uniquely positioned to be a Global Center of Excellence for Urban Data and Analytics. At present, UN-Habitat, through its Strategic Plan (2020-2023) has the objective of repositioning itself as the global center of excellence for sustainable urban policy and practice. To realize this vision, UN-Habitat requires robust data and analytics to track the latest dynamics and propose cutting edge solutions and innovations towards sustainable urbanization. This cannot be achieved if UN-Habitat doesn't scale up its data and analytical capabilities particularly on the top priority policy issues determining whether cities and human settlements offer the best possible quality of life for all people everywhere. The scale, speed and complexity of urban development dynamics globally means that UN-Habitat's capacity to track and analyze those dynamics needs to evolve fast with required agility and innovation, and human resources.

Enhancing UN-Habitat’s urban data and analytics capabilities is therefore necessary to deliver its mandate. UN-Habitat has a “... role within the United Nations system as the focal point on sustainable urbanization and human settlements, including in the implementation, follow-up to and review of the New Urban Agenda, in collaboration with other United Nations system entities”[i]. In this capacity, UN-Habitat plays a central role in the work of the United Nations in monitoring and reporting of sustainable urbanization and human settlements statistics and urban conditions globally. Within the SDG framework, UN-Habitat is a major contributor to SDG 11 and supports the monitoring and reporting of 5 other indicators under Goal 11 and 4 other indicators under Goal 1 and 6 goals. Therefore, UN-Habitat is a recognized contributor within the United Nations statistical system for data and statistics on cities and human settlements. Under this support, UN-Habitat is responsible for a range of initiatives defining the key concepts, methodologies and approaches for the monitoring of global urbanization trends and capacity building support for cities and member states.



UN-Habitat as a Global Center of Excellence and Innovation

The Strategic Plan for 2020–2023 repositions UN-Habitat as a major global entity, a centre of excellence and innovation. In that respect, the organization is refocusing its niche position as the “thought leader” and the go-to programme for issues pertaining to its work, setting the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, driving political discussion, generating specialized and cutting-edge knowledge, shaping technical norms, principles and standards, and acting as a multiplier in the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practice in getting cities and other human settlements right.



Member States' demand for UN-Habitat's technical and capacity building support in urban data is constantly growing.

UN-Habitat has been extensively supporting local and national governments to produce and analyze urban data and statistics. Yet, as the urban transition continues at a faster pace across countries globally, the demand for support in this regard is also growing substantially. It is thus urgent to further scale up UN-Habitat's capacities to respond to this demand, as a Global Center of Excellence for urban data and statistics. This is essential if member States, are to realize their commitment, through the NUA, to "...strengthen data and statistical capacities at national, subnational and local levels to effectively monitor progress achieved in the implementation of sustainable urban development policies and strategies and to inform decision-making and appropriate reviews...".[i] The efforts to enhance the data support aims to establish an institutional and conducive environment to improve coordination, integration, resource efficiency and accountability in data related programmes and

activities in all areas of work of UN-Habitat, including at the regional levels.

UN-Habitat contributes and aligns with the UN 2.0 aspirations of the Secretary general.

The UN Secretary General is leading efforts towards UN 2.0, for the organization to become nimbler and more effective, by developing and scaling new capabilities that promote agility, integration, and cohesion across the UN family. This transformation is based on a quintet of change centered around stronger capabilities for data, innovation, strategic foresight, behavioral science, and results. The objective is to turn the UN into a state-of-the-art data analyst and communicator for better development outcomes. As part of this, UN-Habitat must further enhance its urban data and analytics work and impact, especially given the need to better understand and tailor development solutions for people across locations and settlements. Disaggregating how we measure and monitor sustainable development across geographical locations, and especially in cities and human settlements, is a necessity in today's urban world.

The magnitude of the gap

The lack of adequate data disaggregated at the urban scale is one of the most persistent impediments for effective policy and practice for sustainable urbanization. Dating back to the first ever international UN Conference to recognize the challenge of urbanization in 1976[i], the gap in adequate, timely, robust data and statistics on cities and human settlements has endured to this day. In his 2020 Quadrennial report on progress in the implementation of the NUA, the UN Secretary general notes that “adequate disaggregated data is still lacking at the local level, especially as countries and cities aim to decentralize” and “More progress is needed on promoting investments in local and national infrastructure to ensure data collection, verification, analysis and dissemination”. [ii] Producing granular and disaggregated urban data requires additional resources, technologies and collaborations as articulated in the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF), including exploring possibilities for coordinating with other organizations (multilateral, regional, cities, etc.) that undertake urban statistical analysis and capacity building in order to leverage comparative advantages in the various UMF domains and create economies of scale in the provision of technical assistance.



It is imperative that all sustainable development dynamics are monitored at the urban scale, in cities and human settlements of all sizes. This is far from being the case at present. There are major gaps in the availability of data at the urban scale across most indicators in the 2030 Agenda and other global agendas. Yet, the world is already urban and will continue in this direction and it is urgent to track and monitor development dynamics, outcomes and opportunities at this scale and close to real-time.

For SDG 11 on cities and human settlements, there are persistent and substantial gaps in the availability of data. When SDG 11 was adopted in 2015, most of the indicators were Tier III, for which there was no established methodology or standards, thus precluding any monitoring. While progress has been made since then, SDG 11 is the Goal for which a higher number of gaps in monitoring remains especially for indicators requiring monitoring at the city level which is a new unit of analysis for many national statistical systems. There is currently insufficient data for several of the indicators under SDG 11 and for various transformative commitments and related indicators designed to track the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. It is therefore not possible to effectively monitor progress of priority urban issues or identify high value solutions to accelerate progress with sustainable cities and human settlements before the 2030 timeline.

Major gaps exist in tracking priority issues of urban housing, climate and finance. During the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly, member States highlighted a number of key policy issues recurrently in their engagements, including housing, climate concerns and finance.[i] Further, UN-Habitat, in designing its 2022-23 strategic focus issues defined adequate housing and urban climate action among its top priorities.[ii] Similarly, the second United Nations Habitat Assembly, will focus on housing, climate and finance among the priority thematic areas at the core of advancing sustainable urbanization. However, we have critical data gaps in all these thematic areas at the urban scale. Much of the available data on housing, climate and finance is currently at the national scale. There are major gaps when it comes to the availability of methodologies, data and analysis on housing, climate and finance in cities and human settlements. Housing has emerged as top priority across various global policy processes and remains at the core of UN-Habitat’s mandate as elaborated below.

UN-Habitat’s Urban Indicators Database provides a key source for global urban data but requires a major upgrade. Yet, it has limits in deepening the scope and coverage of key priority actions areas for



sustainable urbanization. There is an especially important value that UN-Habitat can add in respect to housing and urban climate indicators.

Adequate Shelter is a requirement for human well-being everywhere. Almost 60 years ago, housing was listed among fundamental rights of people in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

Supporting the provision of adequate shelter for all was also at the core of the establishment of UN-Habitat and its preceding institutional entities. Today, the right to housing is far from being realized globally. The few estimates available on housing situations globally are clear and alarming. A billion people are living in slums, over 300 million homeless, a billion facing housing inadequacy more broadly. More recently, Our Common Agenda considers adequate housing as a foundation to renew the social contract between Governments and their people, and a means of leaving no one behind. In an urban planet, housing the global urban population adequately is a fundamental condition to realize sustainable development across the board. Member States echoed this in their statements at the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on sustainable urbanization in April 2022.

No source exists for comprehensive internationally comparable global housing and urban climate action indicators. While there are some national, regional and international databases for housing and urban climate action indicators, most are focused on only limited dimensions, geographies or data points. Addressing this critical gap is urgent as adequate shelter is a precondition for human wellbeing globally. Yet, the ability to measure, track and analyze the state and conditions of housing is weak, especially at the local and urban scale. This is possible, as demonstrated by the result of past efforts. In 1990, the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS), the precedent to UN-Habitat, initiated a Housing Indicators Program together with the World Bank. Key housing trends and conditions were analyzed in 53 countries, covering as many as 150 indicators. While elements of this work have been sustained over time, most of it has not continued in recent years due to funding limitations and a refocus of measurements on other dimensions of urbanization as outlined under the SDGS and NUA.

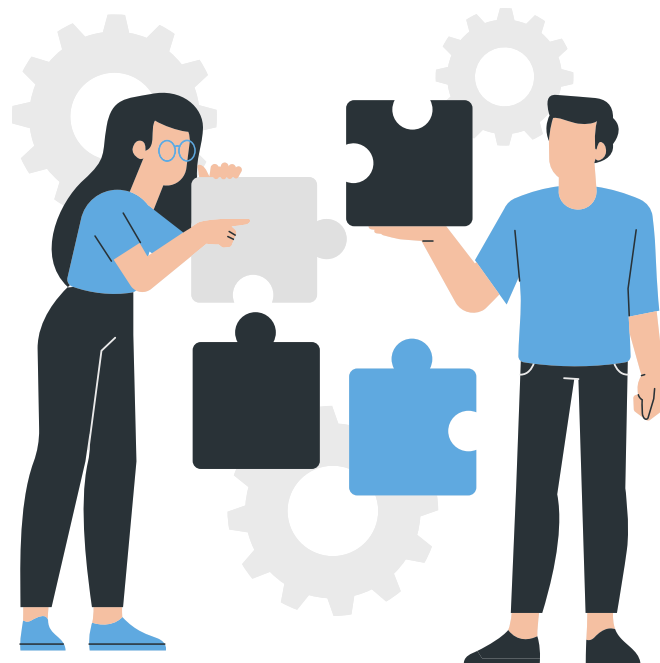
Equally new and emerging areas of concern such as climate action require new data to match the daily analysis and projections of the climate change trends in cities



This data is needed at the local level to ensure local policy action is evidence based.

High demand for climate action and housing data is observed among member States and stakeholders and this also extends to the need to monitor the associated inequalities and understanding who is being left behind. Given the magnitude of challenges in delivering adequate shelter for their citizens, member States in all regions need robust and comprehensive housing data for designing effective solutions. Indeed, member States did commit in the NUA to “promote differentiated analysis of housing supply and demand based on high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data at the national, subnational and local levels, considering specific social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions.” [i] Furthermore, climate action and housing indicators are essential for decision making and action by other stakeholders including the private sectors, which is a key factor in the delivery of adequate shelter in complement to the public sector. Better monitoring and reporting on the state of climate action and adequate shelter delivery is also key in transparency and accountability as foundations for renewing the social contract between governments and people, a core priority of Our Common Agenda.

Monitoring performance of cities is to tailor policy solutions and investments. There are currently many thematic urban performance indices for cities that track key bottlenecks and opportunities. Through the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF), UN-Habitat is responding to the broad SDG and NUA Agenda needs and to an unprecedented degree of interest in, dependence on and recognition of the importance of data and evidence. UN-Habitat’s response to the city data needs requires continuous innovation, both to begin to measure emerging areas of concern such as climate action, urban crises, etc and to improve how we measure the traditional urban thematic areas that have always been part of Global Urban Indicators Programme. While there is a proliferation of indices, they are often narrow in their scope and coverage of issues and cities globally. With its mandate as the focal point for sustainable



urbanization and human settlements in the United Nations, UN-Habitat is well placed to lead in this regard. It also has extensive expertise and innovative tools that are transforming the way in which urban development is tracked and analyzed. Most recently, together with the European Commission, UN-Habitat developed a new common definition and measurement of “cities, urban and rural area” globally for the first time.[i] This allows comparable tracking and analysis of urban development globally. Furthermore, UN-Habitat has a global leadership role in convening collaboration within the UN system on urban data and partnership, through the full endorsements of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) by the UN Statistical Commission in 2022. UN-Habitat is therefore currently developing an Urban Performance Index that is aligned with the UMF in collaboration with the Economist. This will be a comprehensive index to cover 1,000 cities and is expected to empower both city and national leaders to drive change. In addition, there are various UMF adaptations such as the Global Quality of Life Index, Child Friendly Cities Index and the Shanghai Adapted index for urban sustainability, for which UN-Habitat is working with various partners on their articulation and development to ensure they are all aligned with the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF).



The Global Urban Data Fund

Rationale

The need to revitalize and scale up global urban data and statistics is clear and urgent. Without adequate, robust and timely tracking of development at the urban scale, it is simply not possible to monitor progress towards delivering a better quality of life for all. This is evident given that the world is already urban and will continue to be in future. The wellbeing of current and future generations is directly tied to how we plan and manage cities and human settlements, and this in turn depends on our ability to effectively measure and monitor progress.

Given the magnitude of the gap and need, UN-Habitat proposes the establishment of a Global Urban Data Fund which can pool resources from multiple contributors and partners. Such a modality is necessary for the following reasons:

- To ensure that adequate resources are mobilized to match the enormous scale of the challenge, as well as the rapidly changing global urban dynamics.
- To build strong partnerships and collaboration to pool efforts, expertise and resources for greater impact and results
- To ensure multi-year, longer time activities that enable continuity over time for sustainable impacts and change.
- To ensure the global scope and coverage of activities under the initiative given that the urban transition experienced everywhere.
- To tackle the persistent challenge of fragmented efforts and initiatives around urban data and statistics globally, which if amalgamated, could delivery major results.

- Policy knowledge on the status and conditions of urbanization globally
- Capacities to design, implement and monitor effective urban policies and investments.
- Capacities to monitor and respond to spatial inequalities within and between cities.
- Accountability and renewal of the social contract between government and people
- Applications of innovations and AI in data production, analysis and visualization
- Coverage and reporting of SDG 11 and NUA indicators as articulated under the Global urban Monitoring Framework.



Objective

The objective of the Global Urban Data Fund is to revitalize and scale up the availability, quality and analysis of urban data and statistics globally to strengthen the design, execution and monitoring policies and practice aligned to the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11.

Specifically, the Global Urban Data Fund will facilitate establishment and scale up of:

- How we define new concepts, methodologies and approaches for the measurement of urban data and statistics
- Support improvements in the availability of sustainable development indicators at the urban scale across social, economic, environmental dimensions
- Improve capacities of member States and other stakeholders for more effective tracking of key urban trends and conditions
- Strengthen the capacities of local and national statistical offices/authorities in producing development indicators disaggregated at the urban scale.
- Enable urban foresight analysis to strengthen understanding of how cities and urbanization will evolve and impact humanity's future.

The Fund is expected to lead to improved:

Implementation Phases

To realize the above objectives, a two-phased approach is proposed for the Global Urban Data Fund.

PHASE I: Facilitate methodological refinements, capacity building, data production, and revamping the Global Urban and Housing Indicators Platform (2023-2025)



Total Budget: US\$ 5 Million

The first Phase is aligned with the current Strategic Plan of UN-Habitat (2020-2025), which is being extended to 2025. It will focus specifically on sustaining the gains around methodology developments, capacity building for member states, data production for new and emerging areas, and revamping housing data and analytics.

Furthermore, given the enormous magnitude of the climate action, urban crises, and housing challenges globally which have persisted over decades, there is an urgent need to ensure data-driven assessment of the key drivers, enablers, and most impactful actions needed. Housing indicators from at least 100 countries globally will be targeted for production in this phase.

PHASE II: Maintenance and continuous data production for the Urban Indicator Database (2026-2029)



Total Budget: US\$ 30 Million

The second Phase will be a backbone for the next Strategic Plan (2026-29) of UN-Habitat. Building on the first phase, the data transformation journey will continue through a wider upgrade of UN-Habitat's existing Urban Indicators Database. While the database is currently playing a major role in generating data for the monitoring of SDG 11, there is a critical need to expand its coverage across the breadth and scope of indicators needed to monitor sustainable urbanization more comprehensively. Initial preparations for the upgrade of the Urban Indicators Database will start during the first phase, resulting in a detailed proposal and framework for operationalization. Therefore, this phase will play a critical role of scaling up the gains of phase I including production of more disaggregated data at the city and other lower levels and ensure expansion of data coverage on priority urban sectors and produce read-to-use visualization for the Urban Indicators database. This phase will also ensure that data is translated into knowledge for guiding policies and ensuring timely use of data in major publications such as the World Cities Report and other thematic or regional urban reports.



BUDGET

PHASE I: Facilitate methodological refinements, capacity building, data production, and revamping the Global Urban and Housing Indicators Platform (2023-2025)

Global Urban Data Production Fund					
Item description	Avg. unit cost - USD	# of Units	Unit	Total Cost (USD)	Remarks
1. Human Resources - Global					
Programme Coordinator (Statistician) (P4)		3	month	0	To lead overall implementation
Programme Coordinator (Statistician) (NOD)	5,000	36	year	180000	To provide statistical support
National Officer - Statistics (NOC)	48,000	3	year	144000	To provide statistical support
National Officer- Statistics (NOB)	36,000	3	year	108000	To provide statistical support
Statistical Officer -Statistics (G7)	50,700	3	year	152100	To provide statistical support
Regional consultant- Africa	4,500	36	month	162000	
Regional consultant-LAC	4,500	36	month	162000	
Regional Consultant- Arab States	4,500	36	month	162000	
Regional Consultant- Asia	4,500	36	month	162000	
Research consultant (global)	7500	18	month	135000	To produce global, regional, national and country analytics from the data
Sub-total				1,367,100	
2. National data capacity strengthening					
National/local consultants (80 countries, 12 months consultancy/country)	3000	1080	month	3240000	Data capacity building + training in LDCs; 6 months in each in 46s LDCs and other low income countries
Regional workshops	40,000	5	workshop	200000	Regional technical preparations and review of data collection
Sub-total				3440000	

3. Data platform and softwares					
Digital housing indicator platform	45,000	1	platform	45000	Interactive online platform able to generate global, regional, national, country and city reports/analysis
Software upgrades	6,000	3	software	18000	
Sub-total				63000	
4. Global engagement and dissemination					
Events at global meetings/Forums	20,000	3	events	60000	WUF, HLPF and others
Global webinar series	4000	9	webinars	36000	Regional + global
Sub-total				96000	
5. Travel					
Staff (international)	3000	36	mission	108000	Technical assistance and support to member States
Sub-total				108000	
6. Outreach					
Communications	60,000		various	60,000	Various communication products
Editing and printing	40,000		various	60,000	
Sub-total				120,000	
7. Equipment					
Computers	2500	7	computer	17500	
Sub-total				17500	
GRAND TOTAL				5,115,600	

[i] A/RES/77/173, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 2022

[ii] New Urban Agenda, 2015

[iii] The first international UN conference to fully recognize the challenge of urbanization was held in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada. This conference - Habitat I - resulted in the creation, on 19 December 1977, of the precursors of UN-Habitat: the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements - an intergovernmental body - and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (commonly referred to as "Habitat"), which served as the executive secretariat of the Commission.

[iv] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/278/72/PDF/N2227872.pdf?OpenElement>

[v] <https://www.un.org/pga/76/wp-content/uploads/sites/101/2022/06/Final-HLM-on-NUA-PGA-Summary.pdf>

[vi] https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/05/priorities_2022-2023_adequate_housing_cities_and_climate_change_and_localising_sdgs_04142022.pdf

[vii] New Urban Agenda

[viii] <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/12/ks-02-20-499-en-n.pdf>



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Thank
You



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yemeru@un.org