



**UNITED
NATIONS**

HSP/EB.2023/16



UN-HABITAT

**United Nations
Human Settlements
Programme**

Distr.: General
19 September 2023
Original: English

**Executive Board of the United Nations
Human Settlements Programme
Third session of 2023**
Nairobi, 28–30 November 2023
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

**Road map for preparations for the development of
international guidelines on people-centred smart cities
as a non-binding framework for developing national
and local smart city regulations, plans and strategies**

Proposed road map for preparations for the development of international guidelines on people-centred smart cities as a non-binding framework for developing national and local smart city regulations, plans and strategies**

Report of the Executive Director

1. The present report presents an update on the status of implementation of the Draft resolution on international guidelines on people-centered smart cities adopted at the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (HSP/HA.2/L.4).

I. Introduction

2. The need to define international norms and principles on the role of digitalization for human-centric, inclusive and sustainable cities is ever more apparent. As both urbanization and digitization accelerate at pace, it is urgent to maximize the benefits while mitigating the risks associated with applying digital technology for urban sustainability. As national and local governments and other actors rapidly engage with digital approaches to plan, manage, govern and finance urbanization, it is critical to ensure that people are placed at the center of such efforts.

3. Towards this end, during the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (5-9 June 2023), a resolution a Draft resolution on international guidelines on people-centred smart cities was tabled by France, Botswana, Germany, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan and adopted by the Assembly (Resolution HSP/HA.2/L.4).

4. The Resolution conveys the following requests to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat:

(a) Requests the Executive Director, subject to the availability of funding, to initiate the development of international guidelines on people-centred smart cities as a non-binding framework for developing national and local smart city regulations, plans and strategies, which would ensure that digital urban infrastructure and data contribute to making cities and human settlements sustainable,

* HSP/EB.2023/10.

** The present document is being issued without formal editing.

inclusive and prosperous and respectful of human rights, and to present them for consideration and possible approval by the United Nations Assembly at its resumed second session;

(b) Also requests the Executive Director to ensure an inclusive consultation, including through the existing regional and country offices of UN-Habitat, with Member States and members of United Nations specialized agencies, national and international associations and organizations of local authorities recognized by the United Nations, relevant United Nations organizations, international finance institutions, development agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, civil-society organizations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, taking into account traditional knowledge, in order to inform the drafting process with best practices, guidelines and lessons learned from different contexts and at different scales;

(c) Requests the Executive Director to report to the Executive Board on progress in the implementation of the present resolution until the completion of the work.

II. Status and road map

5. To respond to the Member States' request, the Secretariat has developed a comprehensive action plan with two main components deriving from the specific asks in the United Nations Habitat Assembly resolution, as listed below.

A. Global best practices and lessons

6. The resolution called for utilizing existing knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned from diverse contexts to inform the drafting process. In response, UN-Habitat is conducting a comprehensive global assessment on smart cities, serving as a factual bedrock for the upcoming guidelines. This assessment not only enriches the guidelines by providing crucial data on smart city trends, challenges, and opportunities, including regional variations, but also ensures grounding in solid evidence and global knowledge. Through a blend of primary and secondary source analysis, incorporating raw data collection, interviews, and best practice studies, the assessment guarantees holistic coverage and in-depth analysis of context specific variations at regional, national and sub-national scales. The assessment will also draw upon UN-Habitat's existing work and partnerships including the Flagship Programme on People Centered Smart Cities and the United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities, and field research conducted with support from country and regional offices. For a robust assessment process, UN-Habitat has issued a global call for partnerships to undertake the assessment. Preliminary findings of the assessment will be presented in February 2024, while the final study will conclude in October 2024.

B. Inclusive consultation

7. The resolution calls for a robust and all-encompassing consultation process in the preparation of the international guidelines. To ensure the comprehensive development of the guidelines, a multi-layered consultation process has been structured as follows:

(a) **Global:** In September 2023, UN-Habitat issued a call for the nomination of experts by member States in the fields of smart cities and digitalization, resulting in the selection of 30 experts constituting the global Expert Working Group (EWG) – the primary advisory body for guidelines' development. The experts, selected to balance gender, geography and expertise, support the UN-Habitat Secretariat in drafting the guidelines, by sharing insights on trends and challenges, providing knowledge, data and best practices, contributing to discussions on guideline principles and approaches, and offering expertise on scientific research, digital technologies, and participatory methodologies for smart city solutions. The group will first convene online in November 2023 to outline the action plan, finalize scope and deliverables, followed by three in-person Expert Group Meetings (EGMs) in 2024 and 2025 for continued oversight over the guideline formulation.

(b) **Regional:** Concurrently, an extensive consultation process will be conducted through both in-person engagements (pending funding confirmation) and online platforms, supported by UN-Habitat Regional Offices. Member States' nominated experts which have not been included into the global EWG will be consulted as part of regional groups, ensuring geographical, expertise and gender balance criteria are met. This phase seeks to incorporate diverse geographical aspects and contextual considerations into the guidelines.

(c) **Thematic:** Supplementary consultations concentrating on key topics addressed in the guidelines, encompassing technology, socio-economic aspects, community inclusion, digital human rights, and more, may be arranged following ad-hoc recommendations from the EWG, the global assessment report, or the UN-Habitat Secretariat.

(d) **Stakeholders:** Additional consultations, subject to funding confirmation, may be conducted with stakeholder groups, including international organizations (such as the UN-wide system, IFIs, etc.), the private sector, academia, civil society, and other pertinent stakeholders. So far, there has been significant interest conveyed in the international guidelines by a wide variety of stakeholders and actors offering opportunities for enriching in the preparatory process.

8. A call for expressions of interest to host the three in-person EGMs and two regional consultation meetings has been launched in September 2023 and results are expected to be announced at the end of November.

9. Additionally, UN-Habitat is pursuing advocacy, resource mobilization, and partnership opportunities to promote the guidelines, identify key stakeholders, ensure financial sustainability, and create partnerships. For example, the guidelines have been presented to global and regional forums namely the Africa Smart Cities Investment Forum in Kigali (September 2023), the World Smart Cities Expo in Seoul (September 2023) and Smart City Expo World Congress (November 2023). Similar efforts will continue throughout the preparatory process to ensure wide engagement and collaboration around the guidelines.

III. Timeline

10. UN-Habitat has drawn on its previous experience in preparing global guidelines to define a road map for the current preparatory process.¹ Key milestones are expected to be achieved as per below timeline.

| Milestone | Description | Date (tentative) |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| Call for nomination of experts | Member States are invited to nominate experts in the field of digitalization and smart cities to contribute to the guideline's development | September 2023 |
| Call for Expression of Interest to host EGMs and regional consultations | Member States have been invited through a global call to host EGMs and regional consultations | September 2023 |
| Call for partnership on the Global Assessment of Smart Cities | Call for academic partnership to carry out the World Smart Cities Outlook | September 2023 |
| EWG kick-off | The global consultation process officially starts with the online meeting of the Expert Working Group, to detail the scope of work, the action plan and timeline | November 2023 |
| World Smart Cities outlook Zero Draft | Preliminary results of the World Smart Cities Outlook to inform the first EGM | February 2024 |
| Expert Group Meeting I | First in-person meeting of the EWG | February 2024 |
| Regional Consultation Meeting I | In-person meeting of regional experts/groups | January to May 2024 |
| World Smart Cities outlook Final Results | Results of the World Smart Cities Outlook to inform the second EGM | July 2024 |
| Zero Draft of the International guidelines on People Centered Smart Cities | First draft of the international guidelines following the first EGM, detailing the key principles and the structure of the guidelines | August 2024 |
| World Smart Cities Outlook Report | Publication of the study | October 2024 |
| Expert Group Meeting II | Second in-person meeting of the EWG | October 2024 |
| Draft of the International guidelines on People Centered Smart Cities | Second draft of the guidelines following the second EGM and circulated across the various consultation groups for final comments and remarks | December 2024 |
| Regional Consultation Meeting II | In-person meeting of regional experts/groups | June to December 2024 |
| Expert Group Meeting III | Third in-person meeting of the EWG | March 2025 |

¹ International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (<https://unhabitat.org/international-guidelines-on-urban-and-territorial-planning>).

| Milestone | Description | Date (tentative) |
|--|---|------------------|
| International guidelines on People Centered Smart Cities | Final version of the guidelines, tabled for approval to the UN-Habitat Assembly | June 2025 |

IV. Key challenges

11. The preparatory process faces some critical challenges which require deliberate remedial measures and effective collaboration across actors. These include the following:

(a) **Balancing ambitions and resources:** the cost of a fully inclusive preparatory process is estimated at \$1,179,384. The Government of France has pledged \$311,700. A \$867,684 shortfall might necessitate a more streamlined and less consultative approach, if not covered. The dedication of additional resources to the preparatory process is also time sensitive given the need to complete the guidelines in 2025.

(b) **Ensuring comprehensive consultations:** smart cities is a very vast topic requiring extensive research and consultation as involves a wide range of actors and stakeholders. This complexity will be captured through the global assessment and multi-layered consultation process. However, the latter remains of high complexity and requires strong collaboration and efforts from both Member States and other stakeholders.

(c) **Managing a rigorous timeline:** the guidelines are expected to be completed by the resumed second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly in 2025. This necessitates UN-Habitat to undertake extensive consultations, gather data and statistics, execute recruitment procedures and drafting the guidelines with exceptional efficiency within a tight timeframe. The assurance of robust work quality within these stringent deadlines could greatly benefit from additional resources, both in terms of material contributions and financial support. This bolstered support will enhance internal capacity to effectively facilitate the afore-mentioned processes.

V. Next steps

12. UN-Habitat will continue to apply all efforts to develop the international guidelines for completion by 2025, but also counts on the collaboration and commitment by all relevant actors in the preparatory process. It does so cognizant that the preparation of the guidelines is especially timely in the context of UN-Habitat’s ongoing Strategic Plan (to 2025) but will also lay grounds for the agency’s work on smart cities and digital innovation in the new Strategy Plan (2025-2029).

