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**Executive Board of the United Nations  
Human Settlements Programme  
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**Update on the preparation of the strategic plan of UN-Habitat  
for the period 2026–2029**

## **Development of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029**

### **Report of the Executive Director**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. During the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly, in June 2023, Member States decided to extend the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 to cover the period 2020–2025, in order to align the UN-Habitat planning cycle with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. They also decided to adjourn the regular second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly and to resume it in 2025 to adopt the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2026–2029.
2. At the third session of 2023 of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat, in November 2023, Member States took note of the report of the Executive Director on the preparations for the development of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 and requested the Executive Director to continue the development the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029.
3. The strategic plan for 2026–2029 is being developed through a consultative process, in an open and inclusive manner. The development process is guided by lessons learned and recommendations from consultations, assessments and evaluations, including in-depth consultations with Member States, United Nations development system entities, UN-Habitat personnel, stakeholders and partners. UN-Habitat proposed guiding principles and a road map for Member State consultations to be held at relevant points in the development of the strategic plan, starting with a first dialogue held with Member States in January 2024.

#### **II. Preparatory process: key elements**

4. The preparatory process includes elements that will sequentially, incrementally and iteratively articulate the plan's direction and content, allowing for cross-fertilization. Continuous consultations with Member States, internal staff, United Nations system entities and other partners and stakeholders will ensure a robust process that reflects strategic considerations. The envisaged elements are:

- (a) Guiding principles defining the approach, scope and focus of the strategic plan;

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\* HSP/EB.2024/1.

- (b) External environmental scanning of major global drivers, including megatrends, transitions and the role of other actors;
- (c) Internal analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats expressed as lessons learned, including those from evaluations;
- (d) A vision, to provide aspired success/impact and strategic direction;
- (e) Thematic areas of focus that represent the priority areas of impact, expressed as desired long-term outcomes;
- (f) Strategic, attainable goals reflecting targeted achievements that fulfil the vision;
- (g) A performance measurement framework for tracking progress in plan implementation.

### III. Recent progress

5. In January 2024, the outgoing Executive Director constituted an internal task force to guide the drafting of the strategic plan. The task force members represent all regions and divisions of the organization, in order to facilitate whole-of-house engagement. The task force started by refining the road map for the development of the plan and identifying priorities for the consideration of Member States. A synthesis of preliminary reflections on the possible scope and articulation of priorities is presented in section V.C of the present report.

6. Furthermore, the secretariat is carrying out analysis of key global trends and conditions and environmental scanning to inform the deliberations on strategic priorities for 2026–2029. The preliminary results are included in Section V.B of this report.

7. The Acting Executive Director of UN-Habitat organized a dialogue with the Member States in Nairobi on 31 January 2024 to present and discuss proposed principles of the strategic plan for 2026–2029 and the framework for consultations with Member States, United Nations system entities and other key stakeholders during development of the plan.

8. At the same time, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services has been conducting a midterm evaluation of UN-Habitat’s strategic plan for 2020–2025. In January 2024, the Office of Internal Oversight Services shared the preliminary results of their evaluation with UN-Habitat senior management. The preliminary results informed the initial proposal for the guiding principles and other elements of the strategic plan for 2026–2029. The conclusions of the evaluation will also be presented to the Executive Board at its first session of 2024.

### IV. Proposed guiding principles

9. Based on the lessons learned from its implementation, as well as feedback received from Member States during the dialogue held on 31 January 2024, the secretariat suggests that the strategic plan for 2026–2029 be:

(a) *Ambitious, relevant and responsive*: defining UN-Habitat’s role in the United Nations and how its work contributes to broader United Nations priorities, adds value, and responds to the needs of the Member States;

(b) *Focused and prioritized*: addressing a reasonable and workable number of prioritized relevant issues and/or challenges rather than attempting to cover all relevant themes and activities;

(c) *Flexible and adaptable*: limiting the scope of the strategic plan to the priorities for the period 2026–2029 rather than taking a comprehensive approach, while at the same time allowing for flexibility and adaptability to respond to Member States’ requests in specific contexts and emerging priorities within UN-Habitat’s broader mandate;

(d) *Evidence- and knowledge-based*: informed by data and scientific research by and the experience of UN-Habitat, its partners and other stakeholders;

(e) *Manageable, realistic, effective and measurable*: clearly structured in attainable goals and measurable objectives that are easily aligned and implemented so that the plan can be supported by a clear framework of meaningful indicators, with unambiguously assigned responsibilities and accountabilities across the organizational structure and commensurate with realistically available resources.

## V. Articulating priorities

### A. Current priorities framework

10. The New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and other UN frameworks<sup>1</sup> are the principal foundations shaping UN-Habitat's priority areas of work and its strategic plan for the period 2020–2025. More recently, UN-Habitat's priorities have been guided by paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 77/173 of December 2022, on the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of UN-Habitat, to focus on the following:

- (a) Access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing;
- (b) Inclusive urban prosperity and finance;
- (c) Effective climate action and environmental sustainability;
- (d) Multilevel governance and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (e) Effective urban crisis response and recovery.

11. In addition, the resolutions adopted at the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly provide further direction for the programme's priorities.<sup>2</sup>

12. Furthermore, the United Nations has defined transformative transitions that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the Sustainable Development Goals, namely food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, supported by four engine rooms.

13. Articulation of priorities for the strategic plan for 2026–2029 will take the above into account while also being ambitious and visionary, responding to the rapid changes in the world and looking forward to 2030.

### B. Global and urban trends

14. The strategic plan for 2026–2029 will frame the work of UN-Habitat in the final years of the 2030 Agenda and in the context of a "pact for the future" that will emerge from the Summit of the Future in 2024. In that sense, current and anticipated trends in the global development context play a decisive role in defining the priorities and role of UN-Habitat and how it can deliver its mandate for high impact.

15. The secretariat has begun external environmental scanning of various sources<sup>3</sup> to analyse the salient evidence and data on major global trends and transitions that will affect UN-Habitat's role and opportunities, and has so far identified the following:

- (a) Current analyses of major global shifts and futures show that at present, global divergence is an ever-more prominent feature defining outcomes for people, communities and countries. A shift is observed towards a multipolar world underpinned by geopolitical instability and fragmentation that is a threat to multilateralism, also extending to the economic sphere and global trade.
- (b) Proliferation of food insecurity, conflict and displacement is anticipated, driven by a combination of rising geopolitical tensions and the triple planetary crisis. Deforestation and biodiversity loss may account for ongoing increases in zoonotic outbreaks and a significant chance of another global pandemic. Unprecedented shifts in the scale and scope of the application of technology, including artificial intelligence, are shaping outcomes for people and governments, with tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Habitat has also oriented its work in support of achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact on Migrants, and other key international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the 1.5°C goal articulated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and sustaining peace and the recognition of human rights.

<sup>2</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/governance/un-habitat-assembly/second-session-2023>.

<sup>3</sup> Voluntary national and local reviews, reviews by the high-level political forum on sustainable development of key Sustainable Development Goals such as Goal 11, reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, UN-Habitat World Cities Reports, reports by the World Bank and other international financial institutions, data from the Global Urban Monitoring Framework, reports on growing displacement as captured in various reports, etc.

opportunities yet associated risks. A persistent wealth gap between countries and widening inequality within countries, coupled with the global cost-of-living crisis, are likely to lead to social unrest and political instability.

(c) A review of possible future urban scenarios in the UN-Habitat World Cities Report 2022 seems to suggest that cities are increasingly becoming places where the global divergence between haves and have-nots, including socioeconomic gaps, spatial fragmentation, climate-driven inequality and the digital divide, manifest. A conclusion of the report is that while urban futures will be diverse according to contextual factors, some of the anticipated broad future trends suggest multiple and overlapping risks if action is not scaled.

(d) Key issues for urban futures in developed regions, where 79 per cent of the population is already urban, include inequality, climate mitigation and adaptation, management of cultural diversity, ageing urban infrastructure, shrinking cities, an ageing population and the effects of the restructuring of global manufacturing. In developing regions, where the bulk of future urban growth will happen, urban futures are expected to be marked primarily by poverty and inequality, demand for infrastructure and services, climate change threats, a youth bulge and secondary city investment needs.

16. The secretariat will continue its environmental scanning while holding internal consultations to assess the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in the light of the results of the Office of Internal Oversight Services evaluation and other lessons learned.

### C. Articulating emerging priorities for impact

17. As UN-Habitat embarks on an ongoing process of internal reflection, three important considerations are emerging as essential to making a high impact through the strategic plan for 2026–2029:

(a) *Continuity and prognosis*: Make sure that the strategic plan for 2026–2029 provides for retaining UN-Habitat’s proven impact, its experience and its existing capacity, continuing relevant and successful legacy activities such as implementing the commitments of the New Urban Agenda and other United Nations frameworks, and building on the strengths of the strategic plan for 2020–2025, while also attending to the rapid changes in the world and identifying skills to be developed and capacity to be built at UN-Habitat during the period to better address relevant dimensions of emerging and anticipated challenges.

(b) *Niche and added value*: Continue moving from seeking “a niche” (i.e. the field of activity in which other multilateral actors are not engaged and in which UN-Habitat is able to build on its comparative advantages) to identifying where UN-Habitat, with its experience and expertise, can “add value” to the work of other multilateral actors. The further process of elaborating the plan must therefore analyse the evidence to determine how working closer with other entities creates synergies and boosts the impact of UN-Habitat’s work.

(c) *Globally relevant, locally applicable*: Make sure that the approaches and proposed interventions of UN-Habitat address selected and articulated global agendas and priorities and make them translatable to diverse regional and national contexts, satisfying the guiding principle of flexibility and adaptability. Along with accepting that UN-Habitat must be able to respond to the requests of Member States beyond its strategic priorities and goals for the period 2026–2029, there is a need to make sure that the priorities articulated and the goals formulated are translatable to those diverse contexts.

### D. Anchoring the plan in the New Urban Agenda

18. The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito on 20 October 2016, defines the global shared vision for sustainable urbanization. UN-Habitat serves as the focal point for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the United Nations system and since 2016 has championed it through its own work programme as well as those of its partners and other stakeholders.

19. The New Urban Agenda makes it clear that cities and human settlements are essential to achieving global sustainability targets. It states that readdressing the way cities and human settlements are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed will help to end poverty and hunger; reduce inequalities; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; achieve gender equality the empowerment of all women and girls; improve human health and well-being; foster resilience; and protect the environment. The strategic plan is informed by the same premise: that

the sustainability of cities and human settlements is a condition for a better quality of life and well-being in today's urban world.

20. The strategic plan further draws on the key principles and transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda, centred on the three integrated and indivisible dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental.<sup>4</sup>

## E. Emerging priorities and approaches

21. The secretariat proposes that priorities be articulated as issues to be addressed or resolved through the strategic plan. Once the priorities have been clearly articulated and agreed upon, attainable strategic goals should be formulated to address the priority issues and challenges for the period, clearly determining the role of UN-Habitat and guiding its activities in attaining the goals. It is anticipated that each attainable goal may serve more than one priority issue. The priorities are to be identified through both internal dialogues at UN-Habitat and engagement with Member States and other stakeholders.

22. The strategic plan task force has begun its deliberation of articulated priorities that could guide the plan and collecting supporting evidence. Early reflections have identified challenges in today's cities and human settlements that can inform prioritization. Basically, the reflections to date suggest centring on UN-Habitat's core role of improving planning, governance and management of urbanization and human settlements by supporting effective policymaking and building the capacity of key stakeholders to implement policy at the global, regional and country levels.

23. Preliminary reflections on UN-Habitat's role suggest the following key entry points:

(a) Using the power of urbanization to advance "equitable prosperity", including universal access to housing, infrastructure and basic services, as a holistic concept in achieving a decent quality of life for all;

(b) Living in cities and human settlements in harmony with the natural environment: mitigating environmental degradation and climate drivers while adapting to climate change impacts, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems services and harnessing the full power of circular economy;

(c) Enhancing the resilience of communities by addressing the human settlements dimension of migration and displacement and building back better in post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

24. Potential approaches that UN-Habitat could use to promote the above include:

(a) Supporting more integrated and effective national policies and governance frameworks for territorial planning, management and investment at all levels and scales, including intermediary cities and rural-urban linkages, and connecting development planning and finance flows in an integrated and mutually supportive way;

(b) Promoting integrated planning systems and multi-level governance, enabling coherence between national and regional spatial and economic development strategies to integrate all levels and sectors of governance at various territorial scales, based on a whole-of-government approach and driven by localizing the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Using evidence-based policymaking, supported by robust and innovative data capacity and systems and improved and systematized knowledge management, and strengthening people-centred digital systems, while enabling inclusive decision-making and innovative urban solutions.

25. Going forward, the process will follow the key elements presented in section II of this report.

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<sup>4</sup> *Guiding principles of the New Urban Agenda*: leave no one behind, by ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including the eradication of extreme poverty; ensure sustainable and inclusive urban economies by leveraging the agglomeration benefits of well-planned urbanization, including high productivity, competitiveness and innovation; ensure environmental sustainability by promoting clean energy and sustainable use of land and resources in urban development. *Transformative commitments for sustainable urban development*: sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty; sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.

## **VI. Way forward**

26. The UN-Habitat secretariat will continue to prepare the strategic plan based on the proposed road map and the updates provided here. The secretariat continues to engage Member States and key stakeholders through structured dialogues facilitated by the strategic plan task force and its secretariat. The dialogues, designed to generate concrete input for the drafting of the strategic plan, will focus on:

- (a) Member States and their designated experts;
- (b) Relevant representatives of United Nations system entities and other multilateral organizations;
- (c) Key stakeholders and partners such as civil society organizations, professional associations and academia.

27. The conclusions of each of these dialogues will be synthesized by the secretariat and will inform the structure and content of the following dialogue sessions and the drafting of the strategic plan. The secretariat will take the opportunity to arrange consultations in the margins of key events such as the Africa Urban Forum (Addis Ababa, September 2024); the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (Cairo, November 2024); the 2024 United Nations Civil Society Conference (Nairobi, May 2024); the high-level political forum on sustainable development (New York, United States of America, September 2024); and the Summit of the Future (New York, September 2024).

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