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**Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group  
on Adequate Housing for All  
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**Development of a framework for measuring and reporting on  
the adequacy of housing across diverse national and local  
contexts**

## **Development of a framework for measuring and reporting on the adequacy of housing across diverse national and local contexts**

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

#### **I. Introduction**

1. In its resolution 2/7, the United Nations Habitat Assembly established an open-ended intergovernmental expert working group tasked with developing recommendations on policies for accelerating progress towards the universal achievement of safe, sustainable, adequate and affordable housing. The present report outlines a proposed framework for measuring and reporting on housing adequacy. Together with the review of existing elements and options for the development of a framework for measuring and reporting on the adequacy of housing across diverse national and local contexts,<sup>1</sup> it is intended to inform Member States and guide recommendations to the Assembly at its third session.

2. Although significant progress has been made in measuring housing adequacy, existing frameworks lack a standardized methodology for comprehensive global analysis that is applicable at the national and local levels. Past initiatives, such as the Housing Indicators Programme, the United Nations Housing Rights Programme<sup>2</sup> and the Urban Indicators Programme, laid important groundwork by establishing key indicators and aligning them with the Habitat Agenda.

3. Current monitoring frameworks, including those under the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, have consolidated the measurement of certain aspects of housing adequacy. Target 1 of Sustainable Development Goal 11 emphasizes improving access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and slum reduction. While these efforts have advanced the global measurement of informal and affordable housing,<sup>3</sup> they do not fully capture the needs of populations living outside slum conditions who still face inadequate housing. Critical elements such as location, accessibility and cultural adequacy are often overlooked. In addition, the current practice of

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\* HSP/OEWG-H.2024/1.

<sup>1</sup> HSP/OEWG-H.2024/INF/3.

<sup>2</sup> Further discussions on the housing indicators are reflected in document HSP/OEWG-H.2024/INF/3.

<sup>3</sup> The slum indicator has achieved global coverage, while affordability is reported for 42 cities and 44 countries and territories.

analysing each housing component in isolation limits the ability to conduct integrated policy assessments, frequently resulting in fragmented solutions that address only one issue at a time.

## **II. Conceptual framework for measuring and reporting on the adequacy of housing**

### **A. Need for a new monitoring framework**

4. A forward-looking monitoring framework should address both current and future housing needs vis-à-vis the status of housing stock, in particular in rapidly growing urban areas, by measuring housing flows in addition to stock. Adopting a continuum approach to the realization of the right to adequate housing, as advocated in the New Urban Agenda, using each of the seven components of adequate housing,<sup>4</sup> would enable countries to create and measure progressive enhancements in standards, including urban services, focusing on both immediate needs and long-term goals.

5. Addressing inequality in access to adequate housing requires disaggregation of data by social and economic factors, in particular those factors relating to marginalized groups. It also requires a focus on spatial analysis to tackle geographical inequities. Segregation and uneven distribution of services and land are key barriers that perpetuate disparities in housing access across different regions and population groups. Further, to address housing challenges effectively, a monitoring framework should enhance local data production and usage capacities for the localization of policies and multilevel coordination.

6. The incorporation of emerging technologies, such as data analytics and remote sensing, offers significant potential with regard to enhancing the monitoring of housing adequacy. Earth observation and geospatial analysis can provide valuable insights into trends and patterns in housing markets, including their impact on affordability, access to transport and the distribution of essential services among diverse population groups.

### **B. Framework overview**

7. The proposed framework for measuring housing adequacy comprises four key elements: assessment of housing adequacy, contextual data, drivers of housing outcomes and housing policy components. This integrated framework would allow for a comprehensive evaluation of housing conditions, which would be clearly separate from the purpose of monitoring each set of indicators according to their contribution to the housing adequacy challenge.

### **C. Assessment of housing adequacy**

8. The first element of the framework measures housing adequacy across its core components: security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy, along with a proposed eighth component of sustainability.<sup>5</sup> By allowing for an examination of the interactions between these components, the framework provides for a nuanced understanding of housing conditions in a certain location.

#### **1. Security of tenure**

9. Housing is inadequate if occupants do not have a degree of tenure security that guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. Indicators include legal and perceived security of tenure and the incidence of forced evictions.

#### **2. Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure**

10. Housing adequacy extends beyond physical structures to include access to essential services and facilities that are necessary for health, safety and overall well-being. It is suggested to measure this component by addressing the population living in slums, and those with access to basic services.

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<sup>4</sup> The seven elements are set out in Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 4 (1991) on the right to adequate housing (art. 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

<sup>5</sup> The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, has proposed to incorporate the element of sustainability in the definition of adequate housing (A/HRC/52/28, para. 5).

### 3. Affordability

11. Housing is inadequate if its cost compromises the occupants' enjoyment of other human rights. Key indicators include housing price-to-income and rent-to-income ratios, and housing cost overburden rates. To assess affordability comprehensively, it is important to consider hidden and long-term costs, such as transportation and utilities, which have a significant impact on perceived affordability. Disaggregating housing price-to-income ratios by income quintiles and incorporating transport and utility expenses in housing cost overburden measurements can provide a more accurate assessment of the affordability challenges faced by different population groups, as well as help in assessing this interplay of location, housing quality and cost factors.

### 4. Habitability

12. Habitability encompasses the safety, space and structural quality of housing. Housing is not adequate if it does not protect against environmental hazards or ensure physical safety. Indicators include overcrowding, housing durability, the risk associated with hazardous locations and indoor habitability. The principle of a continuum of housing rights is particularly relevant to habitability, as the definition of durable housing should include consideration of local materials, construction methods and environmental conditions.

### 5. Accessibility

13. Housing is inadequate if it fails to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Accessibility includes economic inclusion, support for income-generating activities, the fostering of independence and the enhancement of opportunities for community engagement.<sup>6</sup> Homelessness is a visible failure of housing accessibility, while discrimination permeates all aspects of housing inadequacy.

14. The absence of an internationally agreed definition has hindered the comparability of data on homelessness. Recommendations from the Secretary-General of the United Nations suggest a comprehensive definition that includes (a) people living on the streets, (b) those in temporary accommodation or shelters and (c) those in severely inadequate housing.<sup>7</sup>

15. Monitoring discrimination in access to housing involves evaluating statutory and de facto practices, such as a lack of legal protections for the right of women to land ownership, or law and practice restricting refugees' access to housing. Exclusionary practices often manifest as unequal access to housing for people with disabilities, migrants and other marginalized groups, ranging from discriminatory rental practices to unequal access to credit.

16. Spatial segregation within cities exacerbates disparities in access to services, infrastructure and opportunities, reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities. These disparities often result from uneven access to well-serviced land. Spatial inequalities in housing can be measured by assessing the proportion of the urban extent with affordable housing options for different income or social groups.

### 6. Location

17. Housing is inadequate if it is isolated from employment opportunities, healthcare services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities, or if it is located in polluted or hazardous areas. Location can be assessed through measurements of the quality of the living environment (such as availability of public spaces, or safety), proximity to essential services (such as jobs, schools, health facilities and food markets) and access to transportation (such as proximity to transit stops, commute times or transportation costs).

### 7. Cultural adequacy

18. Cultural adequacy means ensuring that housing respects and incorporates diverse cultural identities, traditions and social practices. Indicators include the recognition of vernacular architecture in building codes, the protection of land rights for Indigenous Peoples, community participation in planning decisions, and self-assessed satisfaction with housing and community belonging.

<sup>6</sup> UN-Habitat, *Accessibility of Housing: A Handbook of Inclusive Affordable Housing Solutions for Persons with Disabilities and Older Persons* (Nairobi, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> A/78/236.

**8. Sustainability**

19. The climate crisis is severely threatening the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing. Housing itself makes a significant contribution to climate change. In recognition of its importance, the right to adequate housing must be realized within planetary boundaries. Measurements of sustainability in housing may include compliance with energy efficiency standards, the carbon footprint of the construction sector, rates of sprawl, urban densities or climate-induced evictions.

**D. Contextual factors of housing adequacy**

20. The second element of the monitoring framework captures essential background information, including demographic trends, household sizes, population growth, urbanization rates and levels of poverty and inequality. These indicators are crucial for contextualizing housing adequacy within the broader socioeconomic environment of each country, ensuring that assessments reflect local realities.

**E. Drivers of housing outcomes**

21. The third element encompasses the identification of key factors influencing housing adequacy, such as land availability, planning and governance, macroeconomic conditions, access to finance, affordable and adequate housing stock, social protection measures and the impact of conflicts. Analysing these drivers helps identify the root causes of and contributors to inadequate housing conditions and underscores the need for a dynamic understanding of how economic, legal and planning frameworks shape housing outcomes.

22. As land is a finite resource, its availability and cost are critical drivers of housing outcomes, yet those elements are often underemphasized in policy frameworks. Insufficient land allocation for housing can lead to rising land values. Land-use planning, regulations and effective governance, including provisions for affordable housing and active management of land reserves to support planned growth, at sustainable densities, are essential to ensure equitable land distribution. Land management and administration, the prevention of land remaining unutilized, taxation and urban planning regulations all play significant roles.

23. Macroeconomic factors have a direct impact on housing demand and supply, influencing market dynamics, wealth distribution and access to housing. Key aspects include the cost of money, the affordability of adequate housing stock, the type and cost of new housing developments, and interaction with social protection measures designed to assist low-income households in securing adequate housing without compromising other basic needs.

24. Finally, conflicts can be a major driver of housing crises due to displacement and the destruction of housing. Adequate housing is crucial for maintaining peace and security, as secure housing, land and property rights are fundamental components of post-conflict stabilization and recovery efforts.

**F. Housing policy components**

25. The final element of the monitoring framework provides for a qualitative assessment of housing policy components that are globally comparable and aimed at closing the housing adequacy gap. Such an assessment covers the existence and status of housing policies, their processes of formulation and adoption, policy contents, legal and regulatory frameworks, housing needs and demands, implementation strategies, and financial investment and support mechanisms. By linking policy components directly to measurable housing outcomes, this element promotes comparability and encourages the adoption of best practices across different national and local contexts.

**III. Conclusion and way forward**

26. To address the significant gaps in current monitoring systems, a comprehensive yet flexible framework for measuring and reporting on housing adequacy is urgently needed. The proposed framework provides an initial approach that integrates elements of housing adequacy, contextual factors, drivers and policy components. While the framework provides an outline of measurable elements, the full development of an operational monitoring and reporting structure will require coordinated collaboration among Member States, international organizations and stakeholders.

27. Further definition of the framework's structure and monitoring priorities, agreement on the prioritization of issues, the identification of necessary methods and the enhancement of data collection efforts are required. Once the proposed framework is developed, pilot testing accompanied by capacity-building initiatives and a regular review process would be essential for refining the framework and ensuring its appropriateness to different contexts.

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