

## Press release

### **New Global Quality of Life Index places well-being at the heart of city planning**

*Groundbreaking tool visualizes and connects policymakers and urban planners with new insights, knowledge and guidance using a quality of life lens*

**CAIRO 3 November 2024** – The Quality of Life Initiative has unveiled a beta version of its new innovative measurement tool and platform, the Quality of Life Index, during the Quality of Life Conference held in Cairo 2-3 November. Taking place during Cairo Urban Week and ahead of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Urban Forum, the two-day event marks the culmination of two years of efforts to advance thinking on quality of life in cities, develop meaningful metrics and explore applicability of its knowledge and tools. The conference showcases how the Initiative works to guide city leaders to improve the quality of life in cities through an adaptable methodology and novel approach to urban metrics. Implemented by UN-Habitat and sponsored by the Quality of Life Program, the Quality of Life Initiative transforms how cities understand and improve urban well-being by harnessing human-centered data to capture what communities truly value.

In a world where quality of life means different things to different people and places, the Initiative delivers a new urban monitoring and foresight tool that places well-being at the heart of urban sustainability. Using a quality of life *lens*, the Initiative works to empower cities to address contemporary urban challenges by integrating holistic, inclusive, data-driven insights into policymaking.

The Quality of Life Initiative has undertaken an extensive consultation process involving over 100 urban and data experts, and a co-creation process with pilot cities across the globe. The resulting Index features nine essential quality of life domains: basic services & mobility, culture & recreation, economy, education, environment, governance, health and wellbeing, housing, and social cohesion. Its novel structure, incorporating a compulsory *global layer* that captures universal aspects of quality of life and a *local layer* defined by the city itself, equips each city with their own bespoke index tailored to local values, priorities,



and cultural and contextual nuances. With this tool, the Initiative proposes a comprehensive, human-centric concept of quality of life that is globally relevant and locally applicable, putting quality of life on the map as a primary urban development objective.

The innovative Index incorporates indicators measured with modern data sources including social media surveys, satellite imagery, and mobile ping data, enabling cities to track progress and identify gaps. This groundbreaking urban development tool supports the United Nations [Global Urban Monitoring Framework](#) (adopted in 2022) as well as the innovation principles of the [UN 2.0](#) and the Pact for the Future, exploring technological and social innovations to accelerate the implementation and localization of the [Agenda 2030](#) and the [New Urban Agenda](#).

“UN Habitat has been spearheading the Quality of Life Initiative – a global framework that rethinks urban development, focusing on what people value most in their cities. It measures both the objective and subjective dimensions of well-being, offering cities a new way to understand and improve quality of life for their community,” said UN-Habitat Executive Director, Anacláudia Rossbach. “At UN Habitat, we believe this Initiative will support, and inform the new strategic plan for the agency for the years 2026-2029. We also believe that the Initiative can help realize the vision set forward by the Pact of the Future, which was just approved by consensus by member states at the Summit of the Future in the last month in New York.”

## **FEATURES OF THE PLATFORM**

The digital platform of the Quality of Life Index, now in its beta version, not only visualizes the unique outcomes of the Index for each participating city across nine key domains, but also serves as an engine for capacity building and knowledge management – providing tools and guiding cities on how to understand and harness their data to improve their communities. The platform allows cities to keep their data accessible and dynamic while at the same time private, secure, and controllable, in keeping with data privacy laws. AI-powered city ‘assistants’ are also embedded into the platform and tailored to each city that joins the Initiative, pulling in local and national-level policies, knowledge, and data.

On the platform, cities can map their assets and communicate with their communities using advanced mapping functions. The platform allows for increased efficiency, planning and alignment to strategies and goals for cities to better understand the data and values of people in their cities.



The pilot phase is ongoing in 2024 and includes a first wave of pilot cities: Logan, Australia; Madinah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Nis, Serbia; Querétaro, Mexico; and Vancouver, Canada, which have completed their local indicators selection and data collection; followed by others, including Bhubaneshwar, India; Kampala, Uganda; Punuaaia, French Polynesia; Quito, Ecuador; and Udon Thani, Thailand, making up 10 pioneer cities across the world. The outcomes of the first wave of data collection are already available publicly on the beta version of the platform.

Building on the success of the pilot phase, the Initiative aims to expand to 100 cities in 40 countries in 2025 and invites interested national and local governments and development partners to express their interest in joining the next phase of the Initiative. The Initiative is offering technical implementation guidelines for cities to implement the Index in 2025 as well as other resources. To express interest in becoming part of the next wave of 100 cities, visit: <https://unhabitat.org/quality-of-life-initiative/>

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### **UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations agency working towards a better urban future. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. It promotes sustainable urbanization and strives to ensure that all people live in well-planned, well-governed, and efficient cities and human settlements with adequate housing, infrastructure, and services. By working with governments, local authorities, and communities, UN-Habitat aims to improve the quality of life in cities through projects that support economic development, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

### **The Quality of Life Initiative**

Implemented by UN-Habitat and sponsored by the Quality of Life Program, the Quality of Life Initiative is a global project transforming how cities understand and improve urban well-being by harnessing human-centered data to capture what people truly value. The Initiative invites cities to undertake a joint assessment of their residents' quality of life to identify key areas for monitoring and improvement. By going beyond numbers and using an inclusive approach, the Initiative empowers people to pioneer a better future by providing new insights and knowledge to create more resilient,



compassionate, and thriving communities. This innovative approach paves the way for a more inclusive future, where multiple dimensions of quality of life are brought to light, driving improvements in urban governance, design, and investment.

### **The Quality of Life Index**

The Initiative defines Quality of life as a dynamic assessment, collective or individual, of the opportunities provided by a city for people to thrive. This holistic approach places people's experiences at the forefront of urban development and decision-making. Using quality of life as a lens to assess progress in cities, the Initiative encourages sustainable policies, investments, and community-centered innovations via globally relevant, locally applicable data collection and analysis. The Quality of Life Index is a portfolio of indicators (or tool) for cities that enables local decision-makers to undertake a pulse check across 9 essential quality of life domains to guide and evaluate community priorities and actions: basic services & mobility, culture & recreation, economy, education, environment, governance, health, housing, and social cohesion. Its novel structure, incorporating a compulsory Global Layer that captures universal aspects of quality of life and a Local Layer defined by the community itself, equips each city with their own bespoke index tailored to local values, priorities and cultural and contextual nuances.

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