
Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2021/224 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on human settlements statistics which is presented to the Commission for discussion. The report presents progress led by United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on human settlements statistics and partners on development of methodologies and advancements in urban data collection and reporting in a consistent manner across a set of selected human settlements indicators. The report provides progress on implementation of previous recommendations on improving the global monitoring and reporting on human settlement indicators. The Commission is invited to consider the points for discussion contained in section X of the report.
I. Introduction

1. At its 50th session, held from 5 to 8 March 2019, the Statistical Commission took note of the report of the Secretary-General on Human settlements statistics (E/CN.3/2019/1), in which the Secretary-General summarized the progress on global monitoring of the urban dimensions of the SDGs and NUA, including various capacity development activities and methodologies initiated to facilitate efficient collection of human settlements statistics. Since 2019, more work on development of Human Settlements Statistics and its associated technical cooperation and capacity-building activities was strengthened. Various actions have been taken to implement the main recommendations of the 50th Session report, including the establishment of an incremental and inclusive reporting system which reinforces the United Nations system-wide coordination mechanism for monitoring and reporting, roll-out of the harmonized definition of cities and rural areas, establishing an expert group to work on slum and non-slum categorizations, and development of a harmonized urban monitoring framework. In its resolution 75/224 of 21 December 2020, the General Assembly took note of efforts to “support the Statistical Commission establish a functional definition of urban areas and develop a common methodology for aggregating subnational urban statistics.”

2. The current report comes at a time when declines in global urban extreme poverty is expected to stall or reverse the trends observed in the last 30 years due to the disruptions of COVID-19, with this impact also compounding the forces of conflict and climate change. In addition, more than 80% of small urban businesses have reported financial stress, and at least two billion informal workers have been directly affected. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of cities and urbanization has been challenged as an underlying risk factor. However, recently collected urban data and global evidence points clearly, that it is unsustainable urbanization practices that magnify the effects of the pandemic. Density is not an inherent risk factor, but inequality, overcrowding, poor access to basic services, and poverty have been directly correlated with higher risk of transmission, illness, and death. Even before the pandemic, 75% of cities were becoming more unequal. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic has corroborated what we have known for decades but has also made inequality worse in cities, with the most vulnerable segments of the society being the most affected.

3. The present report provides an overview of the human settlement’s statistics activities carried out since 2019 with significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work. The report covers refinements for several methodologies connected to the monitoring and implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes, roll-out of the COVID-19 tracker for cities (https://unhabitat.citiiq.com/), capacity development initiatives to strengthen the collection of human settlements statistics, harmonization of city/urban/rural definitions, application of the framework for national sample of cities and city prosperity initiative, data production at city level in support of the Voluntary local reviews, development of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework, and related regional dissemination and advocacy initiatives.

II. SDGs and Human Settlements Statistics

4. As facilitator of the UN systemwide strategy for sustainable urban development and United Nations focal point on sustainable urbanization and human settlements, UN-Habitat continues to monitor and report on global conditions and trends and lead and coordinate implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in collaboration with other UN system agencies. UN-Habitat continued to strengthen the use of innovative urban solutions, as well as robust data and analysis generated through City Prosperity Index, global/national sample of cities, spatial analytics, urban observatories, etc. to support the global monitoring of the SDGs and New Urban Agenda and

1 https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/224
other global frameworks.

5. With the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased demand for disaggregated data linked to the New Urban Agenda (NUA)\(^4\) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its associated global indicator framework, the scope of global human settlements statistics expanded to ensure the use of appropriate indicators and statistics to respond better to local, sub-national, and national circumstances and priorities including engaging with a wider range of data producers and consumers especially multilateral organizations, civil society, the private sector, and academia.

6. Data collection resilience plans put in place earlier ensured that UN-Habitat continued to collect data and report progress on various SDG urban indicators within Goals 11, 1 and 6. In preparation of the second edition of the quadrennial report for the New urban Agenda to be submitted in 2022, UN-Habitat has developed reporting guidelines\(^5\), launched the New Urban Agenda platform\(^6\), enhanced the Urban Indicators Programme\(^7\), strengthened our data support for voluntary local reviews\(^8\), developed the Global urban monitoring framework\(^9\), and disseminated the New Urban Agenda Monitoring Framework\(^10\). This has been accompanied by various virtual trainings and capacity development sessions to prepare local, national, and global partners to efficiently collect the relevant and essential urban data for routine reporting amidst very challenging circumstances.

III. Progress on reporting of human settlements statistics

7. In May 2018, UN-Habitat presented to the General Assembly the first of five quadrennial reports on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). The report, prepared in consultation with 23 United Nations entities, the 5 regional economic and social commissions, and 30 partners, provided qualitative and quantitative analysis of the progress made on implementation of the New Urban Agenda. It recommended steps to ensure the successful production of subsequent reports until 2036. The approach involves the production of inclusive data platforms and the strengthening of partnerships with other entities of the United Nations system, with the aim of monitoring a representative sample of national cities so that progress could be reported at the national level with limited selection bias and cost savings. These well-established data support mechanisms and tools ensured that from 2019 a streamlined system was in place to support all the urban data collection and reporting needs for the SDGs and NUA at various national and sub-national levels.

8. Since 2018, UN-Habitat coordinated inter-agency discussions on the development of the NUA indicator framework aligned with the indicators of relevant targets of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the guidelines for reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The monitoring process for the New Urban Agenda draws on the system of indicators and data from the 2030 Agenda monitoring framework, coordinated by the UN Statistics Division and the NUA approach complements the implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda. The global network of urban observatories continues to facilitate the collection and aggregation of data at the local level and the comparison of data at the national, city and regional levels. This system and approach set up a while back is now a key mechanism enabling the routine collection of local level data on COVID-19 responses and impacts in cities.

\(^6\) https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/
\(^7\) https://data.unhabitat.org/
\(^8\) https://unhabitat.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews
\(^9\) https://data.unhabitat.org/pages/urban-monitoring-framework
\(^10\) https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/data_analytics
9. UN-Habitat supported the continued roll-out of the City Prosperity Initiative, a global framework through which Member States monitor the urban components of the 2030 Agenda at the city level. UN-Habitat used the City Prosperity Initiative to monitor the performance of cities globally against a core set of indicators tracking, among other aspects, inclusiveness, infrastructure, environment, productivity, housing, water, sanitation, Internet access and civic participation in urban planning. Given the integrative nature of many global urban-related agendas, UN-Habitat with the support of the City council of Madrid initiated consultations with United Nations entities and other partners on the need to harmonize the many existing urban monitoring and reporting mechanisms such as City Prosperity Initiative leading to the development of a Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) in 2020. The UMF adequately captures a wider scope of urban issues including women’s empowerment, youth participation and human rights and other elements.

10. More efforts were geared towards advancing adoption and use of new data sources that support reporting of SDG 11 and the NUA. During the 2018 – 2021 period, capacity development efforts undertaken by UN-Habitat have helped showcase the value of emerging data production methods such as those requiring use of geospatial techniques/technologies. These efforts resulted in a significant understanding, appreciation and increase in acceptability of the value of the emerging methods, with more Member States now producing data using geospatial techniques and/or requesting for UN-Habitat and partners’ support/guidance to apply them in their SDGs monitoring activities. UN-Habitat and partners continue to engage and build capacities of Member States to accelerate city level data production, as well as to apply the degree of urbanisation as harmonized approach to city definition for global statistical reporting purposes, which was endorsed by the Statistical Commission in March 2020.

11. Through this support, production of city specific data has gained traction, with Member States increasingly adopting sound sampling methods to identify a set of representative cities in which they collect data and report on urban trends as opposed to generating data for only the bigger and more famous cities. City-level data production has become very handy in the production of Voluntary local reviews that have gained traction in the last 4 years. These data production efforts at city level, which are connected to UN-Habitat’s roll-out and continued support to implement the National Sample of Cities approach is resulting in production of data that is more representative of urban contexts across countries, and which further enhances the principle of leaving no one and no place behind.

12. To support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the localization of the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals and the monitoring of urban-related targets and indicators, UN-Habitat disseminated guidelines on data collection, analysis and monitoring to nearly 150 member states. Support to over 90 countries in the monitoring and disaggregation of urban data was provided, including on gender-urban related indicators, to inform policymaking. Eighteen workshops were organized and attended in total by 1,000+ participants, on improving ways to apply international recommendations linked to human settlement statistics at the local level. As a result, we have experienced an increase in production of specific urban data related to gender and age and persons with disability and other groups by state and civil society actors, enhancing monitoring at different levels and supporting the commitment to “leave no one behind”.

13. As part of its global monitoring function, UN-Habitat expanded the original global sample of 200 cities to 1000+ cities to support measuring trends in world urbanization and progress made towards the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. In close collaboration with the regional commissions, UN-Habitat organized 12 expert group meetings between 2018 and 2020 to strengthen the methodologies for monitoring progress made towards the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals and their indicators, in particular Goal 11 (on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable). A recommendation for Member States to adopt a national sample of cities and the spatial disaggregation of data was submitted in 2019 through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

https://data.unhabitat.org/pages/urban-monitoring-framework
Over the reporting period, more than 90 national statistical offices were trained on the adoption and application of the national sample of cities approach and other innovative spatial and non-spatial urban data collection methodologies.

14. UN-Habitat has been working closely with various UN system agencies such as UNEP, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WFP, IOM, regional commissions, etc. to ensure a better coordination around the production of human settlements statistics. For example, since 2019, UN-Habitat worked closely with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care to track the commitments of the Fast-Track Cities initiatives-- a global partnership between cities and municipalities around the world and four core partners – the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN-Habitat, and the City of Paris that was launched in 2014. Various conferences were jointly organised every year since 2018, with evidence-based data shared to track progress across a stream of cities and documenting lessons and challenges encountered. These conferences provide an international gathering of representatives of more than 250 cities that are accelerating their responses to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and viral hepatitis – three diseases that are cited as urban health priorities in the New Urban Agenda and in the declaration entitled “Fast-track cities: ending the AIDS epidemic”.

IV. Global and regional workshops related to capacity-building activities

15. UN-Habitat has worked with various stakeholders and partners to accelerate support to Member States in establishing monitoring systems for the urban related SDGS and the New Urban Agenda. These efforts have improved data generation thereby contributing to policymaking and providing an evidence base for transformative actions. The latest Urban Indicators capacity development Programme is now well resourced by tools and data from the global monitoring framework for human settlements statistics, the New Urban Agenda monitoring framework, a technical note on the operational definition of a city, the national sample of cities methodology, a guide on setting up urban observatories, and nine training modules on the indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 11. These tools have been used as training materials in various regional workshops to build capacity in the collection, analysis and use of human settlement indicators.

16. Since 2018, 18 capacity development workshops were organized and attended by more than 1000 participants from over 80 countries, on improving ways to apply international recommendations linked to human settlement statistics at the local and national levels. These include; a regional workshop on Human settlements indicators for Asia Pacific countries organized with ESCAP in March 2018; a regional workshop for Arab States organized with ESCWA in July 2018; an international workshop on human settlements statistics in Kuala Lumpur, in February 2018 as part of the 9th session of the World urban Forum; and 7 sub-regional workshops organised in 2019 and 2020 on harmonization of city definitions and computation of SDG 11 indicators organized in partnership with regional commissions in Africa, Asia, Arab States and LAC, bringing together 250 participants from 85 countries.

17. UN-Habitat technical assistance along with the technical support from many partners was provided, at different scales, to many cities and countries such as Bahrain, Botswana, Cameroun, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Kuwait, Mexico, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Korea, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Viet Nam among others. With more than 320 active local and national urban observatories contributing to global data collection, the Urban Indicators Database now offers a richer global repository for urban data that addresses multiple territorial levels and is complemented by topical data from other sources, including United Nations entities.

18. These technical assistance initiatives represent continued efforts by UN-Habitat and partners to ensure sustainable access to reliable urban data and information for monitoring global agendas. For example, the New Urban Agenda indicators framework and the harmonized Global urban monitoring framework were developed in collaboration with global partners and harmonized to support the reporting for all agendas, at various levels and with limited duplication. The
new Urban Indicators Programme draws on spatial, non-spatial and qualitative measures from all these harmonized frameworks that are key tools for studying urban formations at the lowest levels and designing policies, strategies, actions and programmes for sustainable urban development.

19. The continuous capacity development initiatives geared towards strengthening the urban indicators programme provide a comprehensive means of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing global urban conditions, trends and issues through appropriately disaggregated data (disaggregated by gender, location, age, education, wealth, persons with disabilities) and provides adequate tools for evaluating the implementation of the urban dimensions of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda in such a way as to ensure that no one and no place is left behind.

V. Global Urban Monitoring Framework

20. As part of the harmonized approach to reporting on progress towards the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, SDGs and other global, regional, national, and local agendas, UN-Habitat has led the process of developing a global urban monitoring framework. The framework is the result of collaboration between various United Nations agencies, regional commissions, city representatives and more than 25 partners from different institutions working with urban indicators. Expert group meetings and bilateral discussions were organised that further guided the development of the framework including development of the harmonized framework principles and indicator selection criterion.

21. The framework covers 5 key urban development domains (Society, Economy, Environment, Culture, and Governance/implementation), as well as 4 local city objectives (Safe/peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Sustainable), allowing for a consolidated approach to reporting on sustainable urban development at all levels. It intentionally draws from well-established trackers to reduce duplication with national and local data production efforts. The framework is a process and set of measures that any city or local government will be able to use to quantify, rate or rank its progress in transforming its urban fabric into a more sustainable form. The indicators selected provide a rate of change or a snapshot status, so that a city can monitor progress and alignment with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda or other local targets.

Figure 1: Structure of the Global Urban monitoring framework (UMF)
22. The Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) integrates tools and mechanisms for monitoring Goal 11 and other urban related SDGs indicators that are aligned with international and national guidance on gender, youth, and human rights monitoring strategies at all levels. Specifically, tools such as the national sample of cities methodology are well integrated in the UMF which allows to measure and assess urban performances in a very representative manner. Already, UN-Habitat has been working with the City Prosperity Index (CPI) which is now being upgraded to form the UMF for monitoring cities performance globally with a core set of indicators that feature tracking inclusiveness—such as monitoring gender balance in internal/governance structures and decision-making processes and incorporating gender perspective into all actions (in national governments and ministries, as well as in local governments).

23. The UMF is at the core of UN-Habitat’s approach to data and indicators for SDG localization, and specifically of the Agency’s work on Voluntary Local Reviews and SDG Cities flagship initiative. In addition, the UMF is being digitized through a partnership with the Global CEO Alliance into a data entry and indexing system that allows cities to measure development performance\(^\text{13}\). With its core set of urban indicators, the UMF is envisaged to be efficient – not be a burden on cities; effective – able to assist cities to track how they are progressing in their efforts to meet the SDGs and New Urban Agenda commitments and inform local action; and, harmonised – ensuring that data is comparable.

24. The framework has been piloted in various cities that expressed interest and will be used by national teams working on New Urban Agenda reporting, local governments involved in voluntary local reviews (VLRs), cities in the UN-Habitat Sustainable Development Goal Cities flagship programme and countries interested in undertaking a proper urban analysis to form part of the common country assessments. From this experience, it can be complemented with additional sets of indicators allowing deeper thematic analysis, and with geo-spatial and local perception indicators to understand differences experienced at district and sub-district levels of cities. Adopting this unified and standardized platform for monitoring and reporting of urban indicators will help countries save time and resources on urban monitoring.

VI. Data and reporting at the local level: Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR)

25. Since 2018, VLRs have emerged as a key tool for local and regional governments to report on their Sustainable Development Goal strategies and achievements and to mobilize a wide range of local actors in support of the global agendas. UN-Habitat has supported and enhanced the VLR global movement through: i) strategic partnerships with key local, national, and international institutions; ii) technical support to local and regional governments; iii) normative development and capacity building; and iv) global advocacy and support for intergovernmental processes. Specific attention has also been paid to harnessing the potential of VLRs to bridge the reporting on the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, as well as to build strong linkages between VLRs and Voluntary National Reviews.

26. Building on a strong partnership with the City of New York – the pioneer of the VLR movement – and the main associations of local and regional governments – such as United Cities Local Governments (UCLG) – UN-Habitat has built a broad network of collaborators within and outside the United Nations system to advance the VLRs globally. These include UNDESA, Regional Economic Commissions, other United Nations entities, Offices of the UN resident coordinators, and United Nations country teams, as well as networks of local and regional governments such as those convened by the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments. UN-Habitat has also provided technical support to many local and regional governments worldwide. In 2019, UN-Habitat worked with Niteroi and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Chimbote and Trujillo (Peru) as the first VLR pilot cities in Latin America. In 2020, the UN-Habitat assisted the cities of Moscow (Russian Federation) and Florence (Italy) and, more recently, the Greater Amman Municipality (Jordan) and Bhopal (India) in producing urban data and processing their VLRs. UN-Habitat is also working closely with the City of Madrid (Spain) to advance the VLR agenda globally including supporting the development of the city’s VLR. VLRs have a strong connection with the application of the harmonized Global Urban Monitoring Framework that UN-Habitat is looking to fully integrate in its VLR methodology.

27. UN-Habitat’s normative work to support the VLRs aims to provide local and national partners with cutting-edge knowledge and guidance. Volume 1 of Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews, titled “A Comparative Analysis of

\(^{13}\) https://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw48081/20211101/73f517510f4e4ddc87d56bc50b66320a.html
Existing VLRs, developed in partnership with UCLG, was released at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. A second volume of the guidelines exploring the connection between VLRs and Voluntary National Reviews and providing recommendations on strengthening multilevel governance for SDG reporting and localization was released in July 2021. In addition, UN-Habitat is currently developing a spin-off research on Megacities and VLRs and will soon start developing a third volume of the VLR Guidelines on data, anchored on the Global Urban Monitoring Framework.

28. At the regional level, UN-Habitat supported the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in the development of VLR regional guidelines in 2020, and the Programme worked closely with the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and UCLG Africa to develop and co-publish VLR regional guidelines for Africa in 2021. Similar cooperation is ongoing with the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) that UN-Habitat has supported in developing the VLR regional guidelines for Europe. UN-Habitat has a unique capacity to link the local reviews and dynamics with the global advocacy and intergovernmental processes, such as the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the World Urban Forums.

VII. Existing data gaps and challenges of reporting on human settlements statistics

29. Despite the ongoing efforts of UN-Habitat and the many stakeholders working on human settlements statistics, the coverage of our technical assistance in human settlements statistics in all countries and especially cities remain limited. In the last 2 years, our support to reach more cities and countries was further limited by the COVID-19 pandemic that largely affected urban areas. This is increasingly becoming more critical as capacity development efforts transition from introducing and giving broad perspectives on indicators to on-the-job training and providing direct technical support for data production.

30. Many countries continue to struggle with the need to produce data at the city level and work upwards to produce national estimates as dictated by the SDGs framework where cities are now a unit of analysis. The Statistical Commission’s endorsement of the degree of urbanisation as the harmonized approach to defining cities and rural areas for statistical purposes is a major boost for accelerated and harmonized monitoring of SDG 11 and other urban indicators, but the risk remains as to how fast countries can integrate the approach to their statistical processes. Between 2020 and 2021, UN-Habitat and partners continued to support selected countries in the developing regions to apply the approach, to produce data on selected indicators, with lessons learned and best practices documented to help in the upscaling phase during 2022 onwards.

31. UN-Habitat as a focal point for urban issues has updated various tools for global urban monitoring, which have contributed to generation of urban data that is directly relevant for the SDG 11 monitoring and the New Urban Agenda. These include urban observatories models, the harmonized city-urban-rural definitions, the Urban Monitoring Framework, Earth observations toolkit, the urban indicators program and the national sample of cities approach. Many of these tools were refined and modified in collaboration with other UN agencies in readiness for supporting the global monitoring of the urban SDGs and NUA. However, the updating process of many of these tools is expensive in addition to only being able to service half of the technical support need that UN-Habitat receives from cities and national partners due to financial constraints.

VIII. Urban monitoring guides and tools

A. City definitions

32. A global definition of the city as a unit of analysis and for monitoring purposes is critical to overcoming comparison challenges among cities performances. Also, at the city level, a harmonised global definition of what constitutes a city, an urban area and a rural area is needed for purposes of global monitoring and reporting. A concrete guidance on concepts, measurements, and unified standards for defining cities was developed and

disseminated to many countries to make sure that we work with harmonized and mutually agreed notions on city and urban definitions.

33. The harmonized city definition efforts are not meant to change how countries define their urban areas but rather to support the global monitoring and reporting in a more systematic way the performances of their systems of cities. Global consultations and expert group meetings organized by UN-Habitat and its partners led to building consensus by Member States, and the subsequent endorsement by the United Nations Statistical Commission (during its 51st Session, March 2020), of the degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA) as a workable method to delineate cities, urban and rural areas for international statistical comparisons\textsuperscript{15}. A manual on how to implement this method was shared during the 52\textsuperscript{nd} session\textsuperscript{16}.

34. This DEGURBA approach and definition combines population size and population density thresholds to classify the entire territory of a country along the urban-rural continuum, and captures the full extent of a city, including the dense neighbourhoods beyond the boundary of the central municipality. DEGURBA is applied in a two-step process: First, 1 km\textsuperscript{2} grid cells are classified based on population density, contiguity, and population size. Subsequently, local units are classified as city, urban or rural based on the type of grid cells in which majority of their population resides.

B. Slum and non-slum demarcations

35. Identifying slum and non-slum areas in census tracts remains a priority for human settlements statistics since a large portion of urban populations in the developing world still reside in deprived neighbourhoods including slums, informal settlements, and areas of inadequate housing and face a range of challenges from insecure tenure to unplanned housing, pollution, environmental risk, and social exclusion. While we have witnessed a significant increase in the production of spatial data, such detailed spatial data on poor neighbourhoods remains scarce and where it does exist, its often out-dated. Without up-to-date information on the geography (location and extent) of deprived neighbourhoods and the specific social and physical environmental conditions faced by residents from poor urban neighbourhoods, the impact of any interventions on health and social outcomes are not traceable.

36. Following the UN statistical commission’s endorsement for the creation of a group of experts for the development of guidelines for identifying slums and non-slum enumeration areas, refinements in definitions of slum areas were completed\textsuperscript{17}, and through a strong partnerships with various universities and research institutions working on Earth Observation technologies, innovative digital-based satellite imagery analysis was rolled out to several countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and later supported by ground-truthing and local observation techniques led by citizens. Support was also dedicated to more advocacy for ensuring that census-based slum mapping at enumeration area level occurs and that many NSOs incorporate slum area definitions into the ongoing 2020 round of population and housing censuses by assigning the categories “slum”, “non-slum” and “rural” area to each enumeration area.

37. To ensure sustainability amidst scarce resources, UN-Habitat together with other partners constituted an Integrated Deprived Area Mapping System network (IDEAMAPS) that combines citizen-generated, Earth Observation, census, survey, and other data to produce a common, dynamic, accurate map of deprived urban areas within cities. In the long run, this initiative will produce appropriate data on slums and non-slum areas with a wider description from the data on quality of spaces, the locations, and basic characteristics of deprived areas with more regularity since these deprived areas are heterogeneous. Key principles we follow from this approach

\textsuperscript{15} A recommendation on the method to delineate cities, urban and rural areas for international statistical comparisons.


\textsuperscript{16} A methodological manual to define cities, towns and rural areas for international Comparisons


\textsuperscript{17} https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1OofxMZtgCcueXy1eNOObAsKCLITH70J
include, harmonizing and working with common definitions, integrating community mapping and other household data, digitizing local satellite imagery, and pushing the boundaries of machine-learning/AI modelling to identify slum and non-slum areas as a sustainable model for future data production.

38. The processed data from the initial pilot countries will be made available to local governments for policy making and budgeting to ensure that cities become more equitable, healthy, and prosperous, and that no spaces are left behind. With more funding for this proven concept, we plan to scale up the analysis and produce common, dynamic, accurate maps of deprived urban areas for over 1000 cities in 100 countries by 2023.

C. National sample of cities

39. Without a standardized method of measurement and clear techniques of aggregation, countries are having serious problems to create a consistent set of cities for national level reporting that is representative of their territory, geography and history. This national aggregation problem will make it difficult, if not impossible, to report at regional and global levels on locally produced urban/city level data. UN-Habitat and other collaborating partners recognize this challenge and have responded to demands from governments to put forth a methodology (national sample of cities) that will ensure that a system of representative cities is drawn and made available for national level reporting.

D. Earth Observation toolkit for sustainable cities and human settlements

40. Use of earth observation (EO) data and geospatial analysis techniques has become an integral part of urban monitoring and informed decision-making processes over the last decade. Global monitoring frameworks such as the SDGs, NUA, UMF, Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction, etc. have deeply integrated the use of such data sources into their indicator systems, while national and city-specific monitoring efforts have also increasingly included indicators which require the use of such technologies. Noting the monitoring requirements for SDG 11, in which at least three (3) indicators have more than 70 per cent requirements on use of EO and geospatial analysis, capacity building countries and cities and making accessible the relevant resources and tools has been a priority for UN-Habitat since 2015.

41. In 2020, UN-Habitat, GEO and EO4SDG partnered and started working towards development of the EO toolkit for sustainable cities and human settlements, which was officially launched in February 2021. The toolkit was developed with contributions from more than 40 organizations, including representatives from national statistical systems, city authorities, space agencies, academia, research institutions, private sector and independent EO data producers. The toolkit contains resources such as data, tools, use cases and learning opportunities, which are related to the SDG11 aspects of housing, open spaces, public transport and spatial urbanization.

42. These resources are continuously updated, and the steering committee continues to advance work around the toolkit’s four priority areas - impact, awareness building, bench-learning across levels, and promoting fair practices for data provision and use. Through the toolkit, Member States, city authorities and the general public are able to access from the same place information and resources to enable them to understand how EO and geospatial information can contribute to SDG 11 monitoring, as well as data and tools that can help them advance their monitoring efforts.

E. Urban observatories

43. UN-Habitat continued supporting the development of urban observatories for local data collection and use for evidence-informed decision making through capacity building and direct technical support on setting up an urban observatory including guiding on resource requirements, development of data systems, indicators

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18 Reporting on a handful number of cities that are not necessarily the same does not represent, statistically, the country, and data cannot be aggregated at national urban level without a clear method of aggregation.

19 https://eotoolkit.unhabitat.org/
prioritization and their alignment to global indicators frameworks”. This included conducting a stock taking exercise in 2020-21 to ensure the level of functionality of all the 321 observatories identified and to inform targeted support to address challenges that they are facing. Main issues raised include lack of financial resources for sustaining their activities and insufficient technical capacity/expertise for urban data production and use.

44. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that local urban observatories are key for guiding responses to such health crisis situations through generation of reliable, timely and relevant information if they are fully functional with appropriate resources, sound data production systems and strong connections with local decision-making processes. UN-Habitat is already taking the necessary actions to help existing urban observatories improve their operations and be more efficient in producing data to inform decision-making and assess impact of policies and actions at local level.

45. The lack of sound urban data also affects the formulation of evidence-based policies and designing of programs that respond to urban dynamics and related challenges. As countries move towards increased decentralization and localized decision-making, there is need for strengthening local monitoring systems such as urban observatories that can support tracking of progress, identification of setbacks using new approaches and techniques and supporting the formulation of evidence-informed policies.

46. Local authorities also require periodic assessments of their state of development and accurate tools to evaluate policy outcomes and the impact of specific plans and actions. With well-established and resourced urban observatories, authorities are able to develop, collect and analyse data on a set of localized indicators to monitor a range of local or national priority issues; establish permanent mechanisms for monitoring SDGs and urban indicators; promote the use of urban data in planning and policymaking at local and national level; disseminate information to strengthen accountability and transparency, and promote local ownership of urban indicator system and a culture of monitoring and assessment.

IX. Conclusion and recommendations

47. Monitoring and reporting of urban related SDGs still presents major challenges from the need to apply common urban definitions (DEGURBA), applying the national sample of cities approach, ensuring proper mappings of urban poor neighbourhoods so that no spaces are left behind, to huge demands for capacity strengthening. Many national statistical system partners are aware of these challenges and direct support from UN-Habitat and our partners has been provided in the last 4 years. Through these efforts we have witnessed an increased level of reporting on human settlements statistics by Member States, but these gains were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic that has adversely affected cities which are key as levels/units upon which data collection, analysis and monitoring efforts are based.

48. The Global urban monitoring framework (UMF) – has been designed as a flexible framework for the formulation, implementation and monitoring of urban policies and practices on sustainable development to increase prosperity levels in cities and can be leveraged for monitoring SDGs and many other city objectives since it integrates the structure and indicators for urban SDGs, New Urban agenda and many other subject matter urban-related frameworks to address in a single framework the environmental, social, cultural, governance and economic components of city sustainability, as well as various city objectives such as inclusiveness, resilience, safety. At the same time, this framework has been designed following the review of many recent/completed Voluntary Local reviews (VLR) and therefore makes it the most appropriate structure to guide the development and production of future VLRs.

X. Points for discussion

49. The Commission may wish to:
(a) Express its views on the achievements and approve the planned human settlements statistics activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme for the next 4 years, including the ongoing work on regional capacity-building activities, global urban monitoring framework, NUA framework, national sample of cities approach, urban observatories, spatial analysis and slum and non-slum areas demarcations, as described in the present report.

(b) Take note of the progress made on rolling out the Global urban/city definition (DEGURBA) and the capacity development plan following its earlier endorsement in 2020.

(c) Endorse the Global Urban Monitoring Framework and its further implementation as part of the harmonized global urban UN system-wide strategy.