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**Roadmap towards the preparation of 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 roadmap towards the preparation of 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

Summary

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

1. 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.
2. 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, South Korea and Pakistan and adopted by the Assembly (Resolution HSP/HA.2/L.4).
3. 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

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infrastructure and data contribute to making cities and human settlements sustainable, 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 Roadmap

4. 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.

i. Global best practices and lessons

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.

ii. Inclusive consultation

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.

5. 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.

6. 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

7. UN-Habitat has drawn on its previous experience in preparing global guidelines to define a roadmap 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

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

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
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

8. 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

9. 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).