

March 2024

Since 2017, UN-Habitat and the European Commission have collaborated to enhance the methodology and data collection for monitoring urban development in the framework of a project called *Urban2030*. The focus is on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for cities and the related indicators that measure access to affordable housing, green public spaces, public transport, and land consumption of cities relative to their population growth. Expert group meetings are convened to build collective knowledge and to develop a community of practice.

These expert group meetings bring together representatives from the European Commission, its Joint Research Centre, the United Nations, academia, city associations, civil society, and the private sector. The research results are presented and debated over two days with the aim of taking stock of data availability and shortcomings in measuring the Sustainable Development Goals related to cities. The meetings have produced recommendations for improving methodology and data collection. Additionally, general recommendations have been made for communicating with the public, crowdsourcing, working with informality, and understanding the potential and limitations of earth observation.

The expert group meetings have provided inputs that have enabled the revision of the methodological basis for data collection to measure the SDGs. They have also contributed to suggestions and fine-tuning of secondary indicators, which will feed into the upcoming comprehensive review of SDG indicators planned by the UN Statistical Commission for early 2025.

The meetings have also been the occasion to exchange on the Degree of Urbanization, a universal method to define cities, towns and rural areas for international comparisons that was adopted by the UN Statistics Commission in 2020.

Ten expert group meetings have taken place so far. The main outcomes are summarized below.

1. **Public Transport** (June 2019, December 2022) - Indicator 11.2.1: Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.  
UN-Habitat encourages the collection of secondary indicators, including alternative metrics of "convenient access," transit system performance, affordability, safety/security, convenience/comfort, modal shift to sustainable transport, and obstacles to reaching stations, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive understanding of user experience; the European Commission proposed methods for country-wide and city-wide analyses of road, rail, and public transport performance, highlighting the applicability in data-scarce environments and the importance of considering factors such as population dynamics and types of users in assessing transport effectiveness.
2. **Housing and Slums** (October 2019) - Indicator 11.1.1: Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing.  
The affordability component and overcrowding are relevant for the European context and are more pertinent than looking into slums. Homelessness can be adopted as a secondary indicator.

3. **Air quality** (June 2020) - Indicator 11.6.2: Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)  
The meeting concluded on the need to develop measurement capacity, considerations for population exposure, emission inventories and source apportionment data, and air quality management beyond the urban level and ensuring national, regional – and possible international - coordination. Communication with the public and including crowd sourcing were key topics at the debates.
4. **Public spaces** (June 2020) - Indicator 11.7.1: Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.  
Experts emphasized that the monitoring of the indicator must be in line with policy and strategic planning at the city level. Public space monitoring tools for strategy and policy development should be tailored to reporting on SDG 11.7.1, so that cities can achieve both the local planning objective and the global monitoring of the indicator. The use of proxy/secondary indicators to measure the quality and distribution of public space was also discussed, with good examples of tools and data collected from some European cities.
5. **Voluntary Local Reviews** (October 2020)  
A training for European cities was held by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and UN-Habitat. The training was based on two handbooks, one by the [JRC](#) and another by [UN-Habitat and UCLG](#).
6. **Economic indicators for cities** (June 2021)  
There is currently no agreed indicator to measure the economic performance of cities. The labour force survey was identified as a promising tool, provided that locations are included. Its advantages are that it is short and used in many countries.
7. **The Degree of Urbanization** – training for United Nations Agencies (October 2021 and April 2022)  
Several United Nations Agencies participated in [trainings](#) about the Degree of Urbanization, a universal definition for delineating urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Participants included representatives from WHO, IOM, UNICEF, UNDESA, UNHCR, FAO, ILO, OECD, UNIDO, UNFPA, and OECD.
8. **Land consumption relative to population growth** (June 2023 on population and urbanization projections, December 2023 on density and urban green areas) - Indicator 11.3.1: Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate.  
Discussions covered diverse topics such as density, urban development's impact on areas beyond cities, market mechanisms, indirect land footprints of cities, biodiversity, declining areas, and the trade-offs between greening and densification, emphasizing the need for integrated assessments and mainstreaming greening into different policy areas for sustainable urban development.
9. **Urban crises monitoring and data collection** (upcoming – May 2024)

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