



## CONCEPT NOTE

### Roundtable 01:

## Achieving Adequate Housing through People-Centred Smart Cities

**Date:** 31 October 2025

**Time:** 13:30-14:30 (UTC -05:00)

## Overview

In the context of rapid urbanization and accelerated technological change, cities around the world face increasingly complex challenges at the intersection of inclusion, sustainability, and digital transformation. While digital technologies offer powerful tools for enhancing urban governance, public service delivery and civic participation, their potential in tackling the global housing crisis is yet to be explored fully. Adequate housing and access to urban basic services are fundamental human rights and key components of sustainable urban development. Yet, the global housing crisis remains one of the most pressing challenges of our time: over 2.8 billion people worldwide lack access to adequate housing, while millions more live in informal settlements or face barriers in accessing housing and other essential services such as water, sanitation, energy, and mobility. Rapid urbanization, climate pressures, and economic inequality continue to deepen these gaps, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

In this context, smart cities development, empowered with urban data strategies and human-rights-based technologies and if guided by inclusive and people-centred approaches, can offer significant opportunities to address these deficits. From enhancing housing systems and infrastructure to improving service delivery and spatial planning, digital technologies and data-driven innovations can be powerful enablers of sustainable and equitable urban transformation.

To ensure that such technologies address the need and protect the rights of the city's inhabitants, UN-Habitat, under the mandate of the [UN-Habitat Assembly Resolution 2/1](#), developed the [International Guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities](#) (IG-PCSC). These Guidelines provide a global framework to help national and local governments harness digital transformation in a way that upholds human rights, supports local inclusion, and advances sustainability goals. By focusing on equity, participation, resilience, and sustainability, the Guidelines are particularly relevant for scaling innovations that address housing and service delivery for people in vulnerable situations.

UN-Habitat has been working directly with cities and communities to improve housing affordability and access through digital tools like BEAM (Building and Establishment Automated Mapper), an AI-powered platform developed by UNITAC Hamburg. BEAM uses satellite imagery and machine learning to map informal settlements and identify unplanned structures. This enables municipalities not only to maintain up-to-date spatial data on informal areas, but also to prioritize upgrading interventions and, in turn, improve planning for basic services such as water and sanitation in informal settlements.

BEAM is already being used by cities such as eThekweni and Cape Town in South Africa, and Guatemala City and seven others in Central America. Such useful cases demonstrate how digital innovation, if thoughtfully deployed, can support inclusive planning, accurate enumeration of informal dwellings, and ultimately more equitable service provision and housing policy.

Building on past achievements, UN-Habitat's new Strategic Plan 2026-2029 places adequate housing, land, basic services, and the transformation of informal settlements and slums at the heart of the Agency's global efforts to build inclusive, climate-resilient, and sustainable cities.

## Roundtable Objectives

This roundtable will explore how digital solutions and tools, guided by people-centred principles, can accelerate progress toward adequate housing and improved service delivery. The panel will:

- Discuss the potential of smart cities to support access to adequate housing, especially for populations living in informal settlements and below the poverty line.
- Share use cases and innovations that demonstrate how digital tools can support local governments in planning, upgrading, and delivering services.
- Foster discussion on key enablers and barriers in implementing people-centred digital strategies for housing at scale.

## Proposed Programme: Roundtable 01

### Structure:

1. Opening remarks by moderator (5 mins)
2. Setting the Scene (5 mins)  
**Framing presentation on the global housing crisis and the role of people-centred urban technologies and tools (by UN-Habitat)**
3. Keynote address (5 mins)
4. Panel Discussion (30 mins)  
**City-level and expert interventions presenting real-world experiences, tools, strategies, and approaches**
5. Open Q&A / Interactive Dialogue (10 mins)
6. Closing Reflections and Way Forward (5 mins)