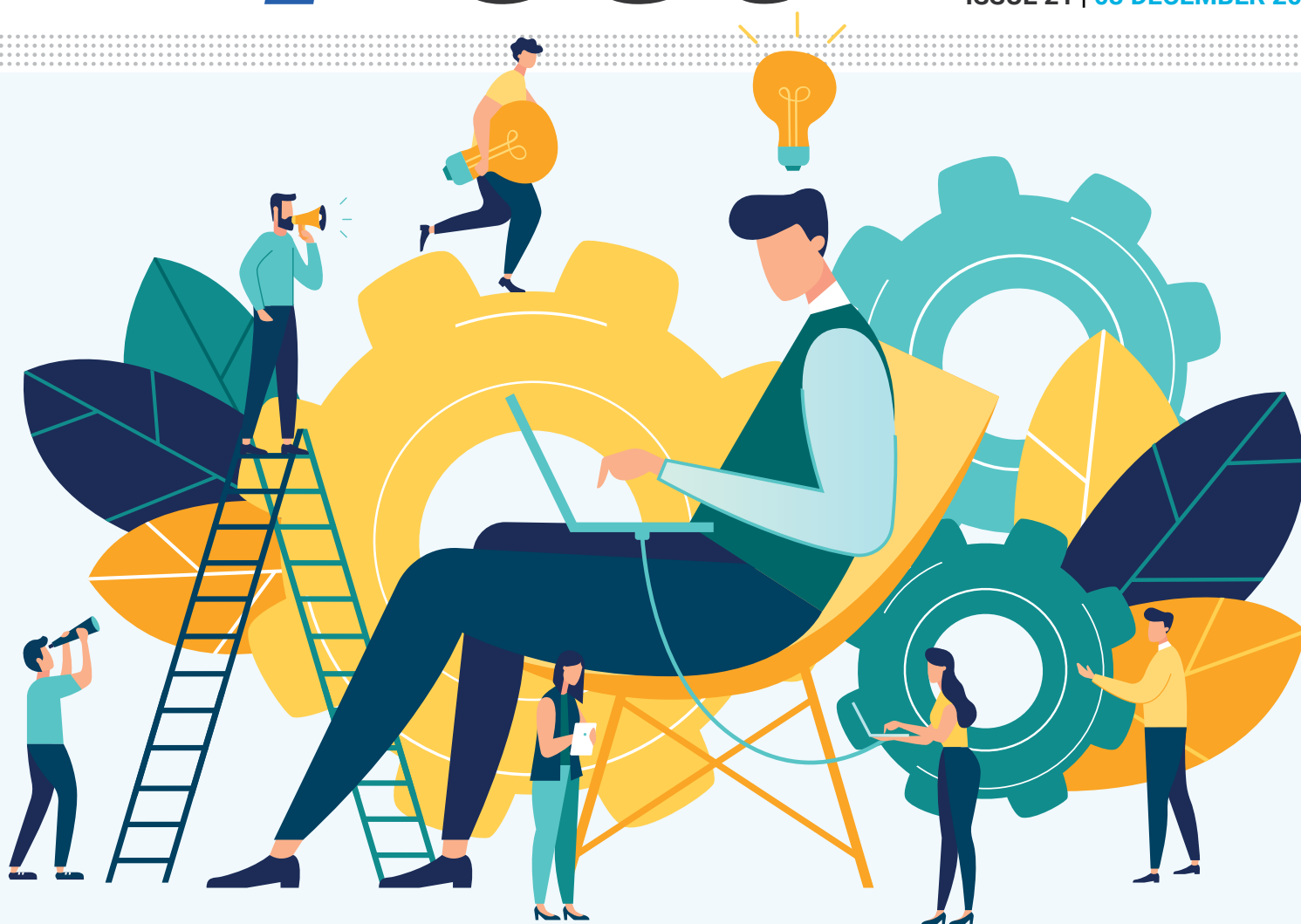


Hab Post

Updates from
UN-Habitat

UN HABITAT
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Focus on projects: UN-Habitat's
role as an innovator and catalyst

Editor's note

Dear Reader,

This week, we focus on projects. We travel to Europe to look at innovative approaches to governance for urban design, and we travel to Iraq and Lebanon to explore UN-Habitat's role as a catalyst for strengthened institutions and interventions. We will continue to share similar stories in the coming months, so do not hesitate to contact us to feature yours!

We are also excited to introduce the Innovation corner, the latest addition to the HabPost menu. You will hear regularly about the hottest developments in innovation at UN-Habitat, and how you can make the most out of it.

And last but not least, the Did You Know section this week talks a bit about Habnet and how we start to reinvigorate it. Have a read!

Happy reading,

The HabPost Team

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Did you know?

Alerts

COVID-19

- As of 1 December 2020, there were over 62 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including close to 1,5 million deaths, reported to WHO. Monitor the situation [here](#).
- Doctors are studying the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant women and their unborn babies in [Singapore](#), where an infant delivered by an infected mother earlier this month had antibodies against the virus but did not carry the disease.
- WHO warned that deaths from malaria due to disruptions during the coronavirus pandemic to services designed to tackle the mosquito-borne disease will far exceed those killed by COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Interested in knowing how the coronavirus is spread in a classroom, bar, and room setting? Find out in this [visual story](#) by El País.
- The [UK](#) has become the first country in the world to approve the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine.
- The [European Commission](#) adopted on 2 December the *Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter* strategy for sustainably managing the pandemic over the coming winter months.
- Researchers at the [University of Oxford](#) found that covid-19 could be causing lung abnormalities still detectable more than three months after patients are infected.



A rather unusual project: Urban Maestro, New governance strategies for Urban Design

Since 2019, a two-person team at our Brussels office has been the face of UN-Habitat’s [Urban Maestro](#) project which is being implemented in partnership with University College London and the Bouwmeester Maître Architecte of Brussels, and in collaboration with the Planning, Finance and Economy, and the Policy, Legislation and Governance Sections of UN-Habitat.

Q What is Urban Maestro all about?

Frederic Saliez, project leader at the Brussels Office: “The spatial design, the built environment of cities plays an important role in the quality of life of their residents. In Europe, we observe that some cities are more successful than others in creating high-quality urban places – places where one feels good. With this project, we explore the “recipe” that European cities apply to generate such successful places, beyond formal urban regulation.



Cecilia Bertozzi, urban governance expert at the Brussels Office: “European cities have developed sophisticated laws and regulations – a governance of urban design, so to speak – to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded. This is what we call **hard power**. Despite all this, the quality of the resulting urban places can be disappointing. Often, we end up with places and buildings that do not respond to the needs of people and local governments, whose concerns may include environmental sustainability, conviviality, culture, and inclusivity. Urban Maestro aims to understand and encourage innovation in the field of urban design governance by exploring alternative non-regulatory – or **soft power** – approaches and their contribution to the quality of the built environment.

Q Can you tell us a bit more about these soft power tools? How do they work?

Cities can be much more than simple regulators or even direct investors. Many European countries and cities have developed tools that allow them to intervene as enablers or brokers in urban development. Good urban design rarely happens by accident but results from a complex combination of interventions by multiple stakeholders, over a long period of time. Within Urban Maestro, we identified two sets of tools which cities can draw from to influence urban design and steer it in the right direction.

The most traditional, and perhaps indirect strategy is to **promote a collective culture of urban quality**. Cities can do this by investing in producing evidence – for example producing regular reports on the state of the city. They can design information tools, disseminate publications, organize exhibitions and guided tours, and so on. Some cities are more active and deploy persuasive campaigns, for example by organizing public debates on various alternatives for rehabilitating their city centre or rethinking mobility.





The second group of tools refer to all actions that a local mayor can deploy to **stimulate and support the emergence of better projects**. For example, mayors can organize architectural competitions and the peer-review of projects submitted to the department of urbanism, or establish a “quality chamber” where large projects are discussed, analysed, subjected to alternative design solutions, and negotiated with real estate developers. We also see more and more cities investing in exploratory processes. These processes allow for temporary occupation of empty buildings, which enables designers to “test and try” before a project is approved; they also establish participatory mechanisms through which urban dwellers can propose or initiate projects that benefit the community.

In general, we need to ask ourselves whether informal tools are prone to replicating existing power structures. We are not certain if the interests of groups with less power — that is typically women, young people, poor people, immigrants and people living with disabilities — are better represented or not in informal processes. Research in several European cities shows that women participate comparatively less in consultation processes, that their opinion is not always adequately considered, and that they often benefit less from decisions. We also sometimes observe participation washing, where the public is consulted but their opinion not taken into account — or only marginally. In general, we need more research to determine the risks of soft power tools for urban design governance.



We have drafted many case studies over the past two years, and it is really fascinating to see the possibilities that cities have to promote better design. Open architectural competitions are perhaps what is best understood by the general public, but other tools can also be very effective, such as the use of tactical urbanism to test functions to be included in future developments — look at [Les Grands Voisins](#) in Paris, France, for example — or the creation of collaboration pacts between local authorities and citizens for the joint management of urban commons — this is well-illustrated by [Co-City](#) in Turin, Italy.

Q What are the next steps for Urban Maestro?



We have concluded a panorama of innovative practices across Europe, and we have recently conducted our last (virtual) workshop, which focused on exploring how informal or soft power tools can be used in combination with innovative financial tools, and how the latter can be powered by the deployment of soft power tools. It is now time to draw up policy recommendations that will be debated in our final consultations with our partners in March 2021.

We also hope to explore how soft power tools are used in developing countries, emerging economies, and in crisis contexts. At UN-Habitat, we have long advocated for participatory mechanisms in urban planning and design, and thanks to Urban Maestro we now see that the range of potential soft power interventions is wide, and that they prove particularly powerful when used in synergy with traditional regulatory tools and innovative financial mechanisms.

Q Any drawbacks of these soft power tools?

Annika Lenz, Human Settlement Officer at the Brussels Office: “All tools do not work in all contexts. Formal tools are not perfect but are created to set minimum standards and establish safeguards, for example when it comes to the management of financial resources.

Urban Maestro was launched in 2019 by three partners: UN-Habitat, the Bouwmeester Maître Architecte of Brussels, and University College London. It is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme.

Website: <https://urbanmaestro.org/>

Contacts: Frederic.Saliez@un.org, Cecilia.bertozzi@un.org



Feature Story

UN-Habitat: partner and catalyst in Lebanon and Iraq

“Strengthening the Long-Term Resilience of Subnational Authorities in countries affected by the Syrian and Iraqi Crises” is a project funded by the EU and implemented in partnership with UNDP. The project aims to strengthen the long-term resilience of subnational authorities in Iraq and Lebanon, their targeted host communities, as well as refugees and displaced persons affected by the Syrian and Iraqi Crises. The joint intervention seeks to optimize the impact of measures taken by both countries as well as several humanitarian and development actors for the benefit of vulnerable populations.

UN-Habitat’s catalytic role

The approach to successfully implementing the intervention focuses on a ripple effect for strengthened coordination and synergies between national, subnational, and local governments, as well as with international aid agencies and civil society organizations. But the project also supports cross-sectoral actions by engaging local authorities in a holistic area-based planning: the aim is to strengthen the systems of local authorities to allow them to deliver better services, support local economic

development, create jobs, and improve resources management. In Iraq, this also encompasses affordable housing and the rehabilitation of community water networks.

The project’s interventions and lessons learned are shared with other humanitarian actors on a regular basis through the Shelter Cluster (for house rehabilitation) and the WASH Cluster (for water projects) to ensure better synergies with other interventions in Iraq. In Lebanon, the project builds on UN-Habitat’s experience with targeted municipalities and complements ongoing interventions. Within the three targeted unions of municipalities – and operating on the basis of Agreements of Cooperation – UN-Habitat has established technical units comprised of local experts who operate under the mandate of the unions. With support from UN-Habitat experts, those units play a major role in the exchange of data and in coordinating planned and ongoing projects.

The objectives

The majority of vulnerable internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Syrian refugee families were living in

overcrowded rented houses in urban neighbourhoods deprived of basic safety and structural and sanitary standards. This impacted their dignity, privacy and tenure security; and while some IDPs were able to temporarily live with their relatives or rent apartments, many were still in need of shelter rehabilitation and basic services. This was the main gap UN-Habitat wanted to address with this project.

In Iraq, more than 300 housing units selected based on the vulnerability of their occupants were rehabilitated in 5 cities; similarly, 3 water infrastructure projects were rehabilitated.

In line with UN-Habitat’s objective to empower local authorities and support them to achieve long-term sustainable development, the project also supports basic service and local economic development interventions in Lebanon aiming to address the immediate needs of host, displaced, and refugee communities. UN-Habitat’s project foresees coaching up to 20 municipalities in the development of project proposals and selection of 10 projects for implementation.



Wael Al-Ashhab, Head of Iraq Country Programme, on how data is collected to gauge the impact of our work:

“ Since the beginning of the Iraqi crisis and the devastating impact it has had on basic infrastructure and houses in cities such as Mosul and Sinjar, subnational authorities in conflict areas have lost their abilities to serve affected host communities, IDPs, and refugees. It is in this context that this project supports subnational authorities to better respond to the needs of their displaced and returning populations through the rehabilitation of damaged houses and community water infrastructure initiatives.

Since the beginning of the Iraqi crisis and the devastating impact it has had on basic infrastructure and houses in cities such as Mosul and Sinjar, subnational authorities in conflict areas have lost their abilities to serve affected host communities, IDPs, and refugees.

Through weekly reports from the project field engineers enriched with photos and video clips demonstrating progress achieved by local contractors in each city, data is compiled to draw a complete picture of overall progress against targets for each output. Feedback is gathered and acted upon during regular meetings with subnational authorities such as the joint crisis centers in the respective governorates, with the municipalities, and with the water directorates in each of the five Iraqi cities.

Throughout the rehabilitation of damaged houses, feedback is also gathered through dialogue between the field engineers and the beneficiary house owners or tenants to ensure that work is done in accordance with the agreed upon Bill of Quantity and the signed agreement with each beneficiary. These monitoring tools help gauge the impact of the project and create a solid foundation for evaluation upon completion.”



► **Vacancies**

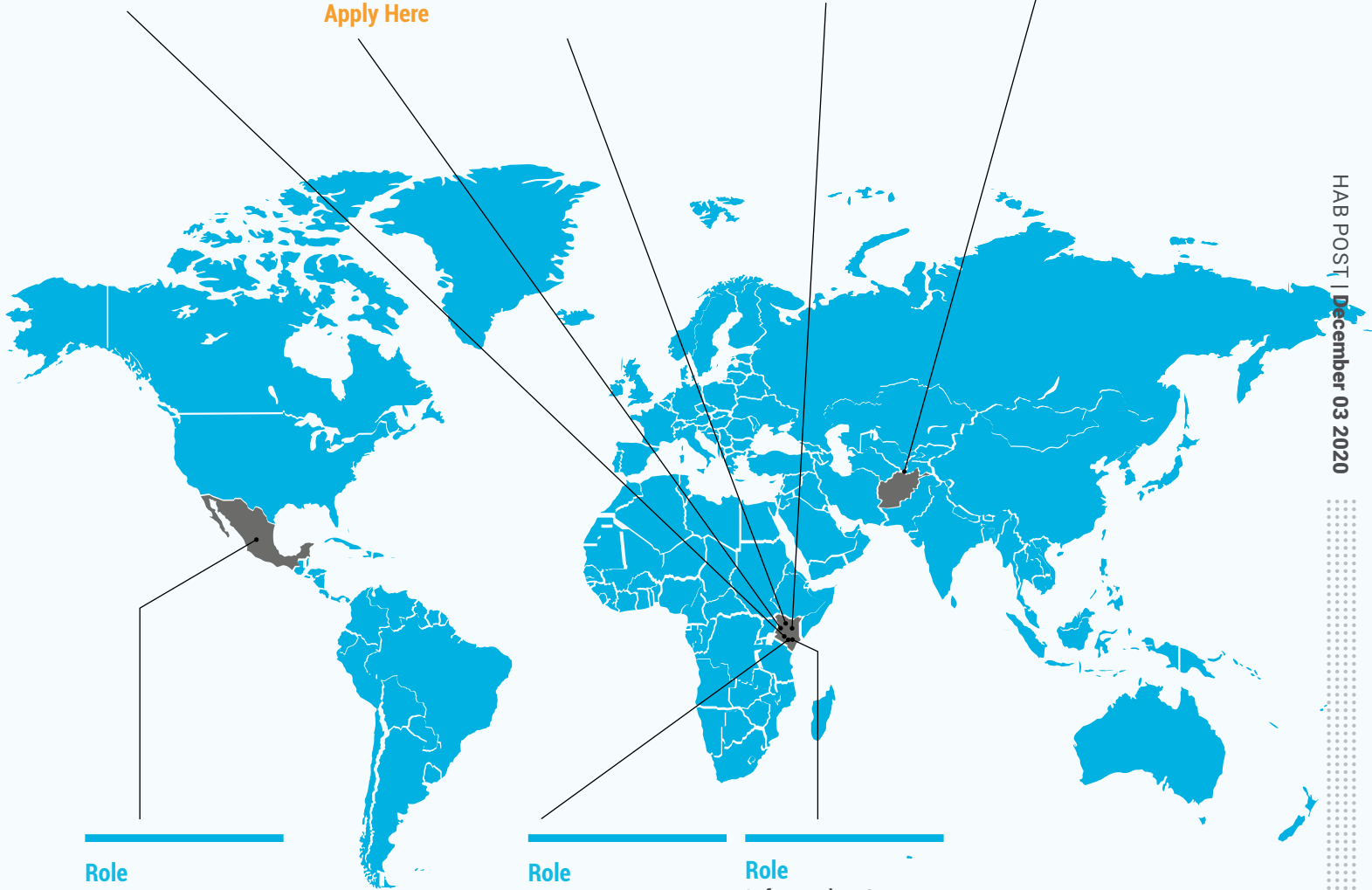
Role
 Programme Management Officer, Human Settlements, P3
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
 23 December 2020
[Apply Here](#)

Role
 Director, External Relations, Strategy, Knowledge and Innovation Division, D2
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
 1 January 2021
[Apply Here](#)

Role
 Chief of Management Advisory and Compliance Service, D1
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
 2 January 2021
[Apply Here](#)

Role
 Programme Management Officer, P4
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
 3 January 2021
[Apply Here](#)

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Duty Station
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Deadline
 17 December 2020
[Apply Here](#)



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Duty Station
 Mexico City, Mexico
Deadline
 7 December 2020
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 Senior Research Assistant, Social Affairs, G7
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
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[Apply Here](#)

Role
 Information Systems Assistant, G6
Duty Station
 Nairobi, Kenya
Deadline
 16 December 2020
[Apply Here](#)



UN-Habitat Year-end Town Hall



When? Tuesday, 15 December 2020 from 3 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. Nairobi time ([Time zone converter](#))



Where? Online (link will be shared)

2020 is drawing to a close! You are invited to connect to the UN-Habitat Year-end Town Hall to discuss your concerns as we take stock of 2020 and plan for 2021.

Submit up to three questions, comments or concerns in advance using [this online form](#) no later than midnight on **Friday, 4 December 2020 (Nairobi Time)**.

Submissions can be anonymous, and everyone – staff, consultants, and interns alike – is encouraged to voice their opinions.

The Town Hall is an opportunity to listen to one another and understand and resolve the issues that we face both at personal and professional levels, as One UN-Habitat family.

We look forward to seeing you there!





Innovation corner

Welcome to your new source of information on innovation at UN-Habitat!

The Innovation corner of HabPost will regularly showcase new ideas, innovative work by colleagues, and new learning opportunities to better understand innovation. The corner will feature content from colleagues on their innovation initiatives as well as from the Innovation Unit.

In this first Innovation corner, we rewind a few days to take a peek at one of the latest initiatives by the Innovation unit: The Innovation Roundtables, delivered as part of the UN-Habitat Urban Innovation Series.

Did you know that UN-Habitat has a range of open source digital tools and apps that can be repurposed to support the mapping and participatory processes of YOUR projects? This is what was discussed at the first Innovation Roundtable on digital tools and apps, which kicked off last week. The roundtable was attended by the Executive Director and over 80 participants from all parts of the UN-Habitat family.

Many colleagues already use the digital tools and apps available in the organization; it was clear from the discussion, however, that more can be done to engage with these tools.

Colleagues also seized the opportunity to suggest ways to improve how we develop and use digital apps and tools. The main suggestions include:



Holding regular monthly meetings to share information on digital apps and tools



Providing training on the current set of digital tools and apps to better understand their application



Developing a centralised information platform on the tools



Sharing the data collected from the tools, and what it means for our work

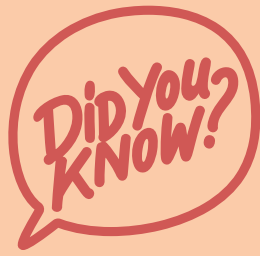


Considering using the Project Review Committee (PRC) and other mechanisms as channels for promoting a dialogue around digital tools and apps to avoid duplication and maximize opportunities

Did you miss this inaugural roundtable? Catch up and listen to the conversation here! And don't forget to join the next Innovation Roundtable on **Thursday, 10 December**, for a conversation on **innovations in data**: what we collect, where it is stored, and how we try and make the most of it.

Feedback? Ideas? Reach out to Melissa Permezel (melissa.permezel@un.org), Pontus Westerberg (pontus.westerberg@un.org), Isabel Wetzel (Isabel.wetzel@un.org), or Abdinassir Sagar (Abdinassir.sagar@un.org).





We're bringing back Habnet, one step at a time



Earlier this year, we wrote about how we wanted to strengthen internal communications at UN-Habitat. After HabPost launched, we released the results of a survey on internal communication channels and we tried to understand how to best reconcile the disconnect between the need for information and access to it. One of the unambiguous conclusions was that Habnet needed a new pair of wings.

In this spirit, Directors were asked mid-November to nominate a focal point for their respective office to refuel the machine and give it a fresh impetus. Focal points will be pivotal in ensuring that content from their respective sections is always accurate and up to date; we also hope they will use their convening power and innovative mindsets to spread the word amongst colleagues and encourage the use of the platform.

But using for the sake of using will do us no good. One of the objectives of this exercise is to gather your views about the challenges you face using Habnet, the resources you would like to access, and your suggestions for improvement. Focal points will be the custodians of this information and will help the Habnet team better shape and reinvent the tool.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have all had to adjust to new ways of working and master the tools to do so. We have all worked on collaborative platforms such as Teams, and we have slowly learned how to create new, more effective, and sometimes more informal channels of communication based around teams, apps, chats, comments, and emoticons. What could this mean for Habnet? Help us answer this question by making your voice heard.

For more information, contact Hellen Nyabera (hellen.nyabera@un.org).



Participate!

Want your story featured? Submit your ideas or reach out to us at unhabitat-habpost@un.org.

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