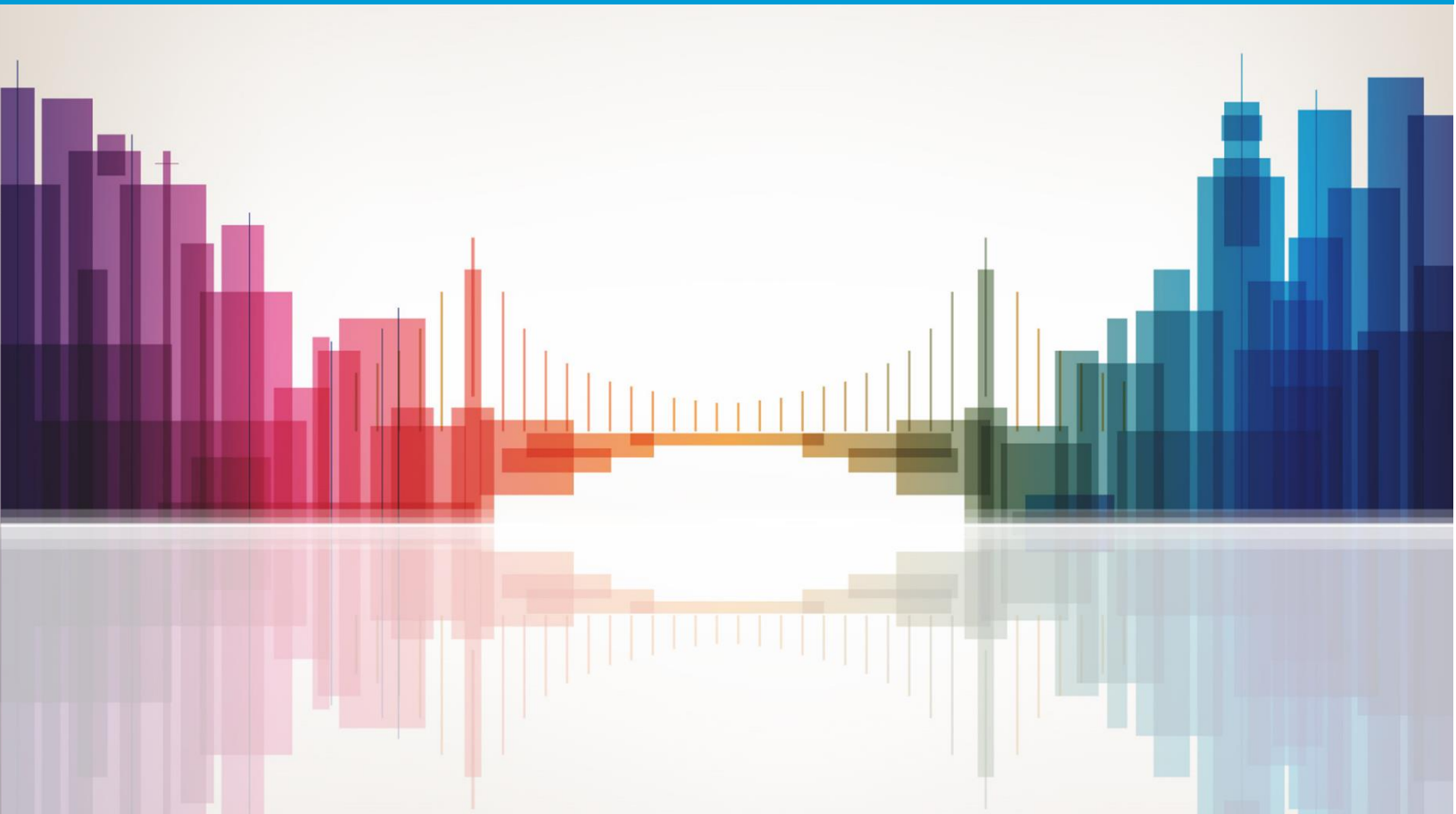# Eighth Meeting of United for Smart Sustainable Cities

19 September 2024
Meeting Report



Co-organized by:

Hosted by:

# Contents

# Introduction to the U4SSC

The "United for Smart Sustainable Cities" (U4SSC) is a United Nations initiative, coordinated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Additionally, U4SSC is supported by the following 15 other UN Agencies and Programmes:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

- United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP)
- United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV)
- World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

U4SSC was established in 2016 with the aim of envisioning smart and sustainable city actions towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Since its creation, this initiative has been serving as the global platform to advocate for public policies and drive discussions revolving around the use of digital technologies to facilitate and ease the transition to Smart Sustainable Cities (SSCs) and accelerate digital transformation in cities and communities.

# Objectives and Programme

The Eighth Meeting of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) was convened to review key deliverables and projects, provide updates from thematic groups, and present the U4SSC Annual Work Plan for 2024-2025. The meeting emphasized collaboration, innovation, and strategic direction for enabling sustainable cities through digital transformation. It was attended by representatives from various UN agencies, city leaders, and experts from different thematic working groups.

The objectives of the Eighth U4SSC meeting were to:

- Provide an update on the work of the U4SSC Thematic Groups;
- Present the activities of the U4SSC Hub;
- Discuss new U4SSC activities and approve the U4SSC Annual Work Plan (2024-2025).

The programme and the presentations of the Eighth U4SSC Meeting can be found at: https://u4ssc.itu.int/latest-meetings/8th-meeting/

# Highlights of the Discussion

## Opening Remarks

The meeting began with opening statements from distinguished speakers:

**Seizo Onoe**
Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, ITU

During the 8th Meeting of the U4SSC, Seizo Onoe, Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau at the ITU, highlighted the critical role of cities in shaping a sustainable future. He underscored the importance of technology and innovation as catalysts for creating more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. Onoe emphasized the significance of collaboration and shared vision among stakeholders, acknowledging the strong support from the UN family and the contributions of partners like UNEP, UN-Habitat, and UNECE in advancing the U4SSC initiative. He celebrated the launch of two new reports on policy benchmarks for cities' digital transformation and data and API requirements for centralized smart city platforms, praising these as vital tools for fostering effective collaboration among city leaders, businesses, and communities. Concluding his remarks, Onoe called for continued partnership, the exchange of ideas, and pushing boundaries to make the cities of tomorrow a reality today.

**Patricia Carmona,**
Department Officer, Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness Department, UN Tourism

During the opening remarks at the 8th U4SSC Meeting, Patricia Carmona, representing UN Tourism, emphasized the importance of integrating tourism into the urban agenda to support sustainable and resilient city development in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She highlighted the role of cities as hubs for tourism, driving socio-economic development, employment and fostering social inclusion. Carmona underscored the need for data-driven approaches to urban tourism management, particularly on key issues across urban and tourism policy such as infrastructure, mobility, resource management, and community engagement. She also noted the creation of U4SSC's Smart Destination Platform, co-led by UN Tourism and SEGITTUR, as a vital tool for enhancing decision-making capabilities through smart technologies. UN Tourism reaffirmed its commitment to partnering with U4SSC in advancing sustainable, inclusive, and innovative urban tourism practices.

# Highlights of the Discussion



**Okan Geray,**
Chair, U4SSC

Okan Geray, provided an overview of U4SSC's growth, emphasizing its role in fostering collaboration for smart sustainable cities and communities, and shared updates on the progress made by Thematic Groups. He celebrated the success of the U4SSC Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) project, with over 200 cities participating, and highlighted the importance of the U4SSC Country Hubs in Austria and Ghana.

# Highlights of the Discussion

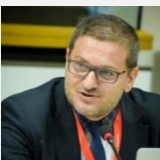## Session 1: U4SSC Deliverables and Projects

**Wendy Teresa Goico Campagna,**
Vice-Chair, U4SSC

Moderated by Wendy Teresa Goico Campagna, Vice-Chair of U4SSC, the first session provided an overview of the deliverables and ongoing projects within U4SSC. Speakers from different working groups shared progress updates and practical examples of how their work is impacting cities.

**Bettina Tratz-Ryan**
Co-Leader of Working Group 2 of the Thematic Group on Enabling People-Centred Cities through Digital Transformation

Bettina Tratz-Ryan presented updates on Working Group 2 of the Thematic Group on Enabling People-Centred Cities through Digital Transformation. This Working Group has developed a new publication on Dynamic Policy benchmarks for digital transformation of people-centred cities. The publication introduces the Dynamic Policy Maturity Benchmark Model, which helps cities update their policy frameworks to keep pace with rapid technological changes while ensuring sustainability. The model uses a dynamic benchmarking approach to assess the impact of digital technology on thresholds, promoting ongoing policy evolution and stakeholder engagement for effective, inclusive urban development aligned with SDG11.

**Leonidas Anthopoulos,**
Leader of Working Group 6 of Thematic Group on City Platforms

Leonidas Anthopoulos presented updates on Working Group 6 of the Thematic Group on City Platforms. This Working Group has developed a new publication on Data and API requirements for centralized smart city platforms. The publication outlines the essential data management and API standards needed for smart city platforms to function as central hubs. The publication introduces the "smart city as a hub" (SCHub) concept, which focuses on connecting disparate data sources and enhancing data management through unified APIs. It provides practical use cases and serves as a guide for urban planners and policymakers to improve smart city integration and efficiency.

# Highlights of the Discussion

**Arne Ingebrigtsen,**
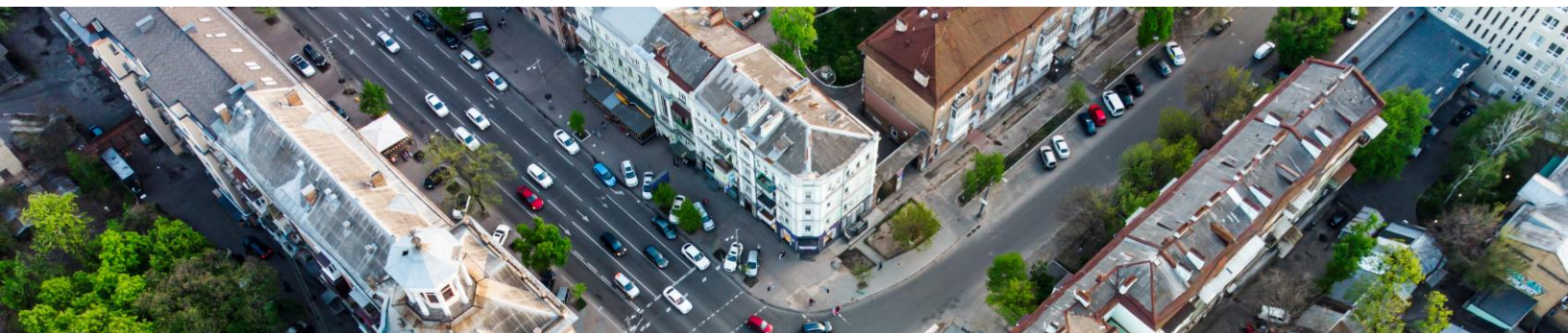CEO, City of Kristiansund, Norway

Arne Ingebrigtsen shared information on a new Thematic Group on "Social-Cultural Sustainability in People-centered City Governance." This new Thematic Group focuses on developing quantifiable indicators for measuring social and cultural sustainability in urban governance. As part of the U4SSC initiative, the project aims to balance social-cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability by creating a digital decision support system to assist cities in integrating social and cultural factors into their governance models.

Through a combination of conceptual analysis, expert interviews, and citizen engagement, the project will define key social-cultural sustainability metrics, focusing on personal aspects such as trust, security, self-esteem, and social support. By testing these indicators in real-world urban environments, the project will provide actionable guidelines for city officials to enhance social well-being while balancing other sustainability goals. The deliverables include a set of quantifiable social-cultural sustainability indicators, case study summaries, final guidelines, and a digital tool to aid cities worldwide. This Thematic Group is set to play a crucial role in shaping how cities can integrate social and cultural aspects into their decision-making processes, contributing to more sustainable and people-centered urban development.

**Warren Smith,**
Co-leader of the Working Group on Intergenerational Procurement for People-Centred Cities

Warren Smith presented an overview of the work he's led until now, which included the development and launch of the Procurement Guidelines for Smart Sustainable Cities. He then presented the objectives of the new Working Group on Intergenerational Procurement for People-Centred Cities, with a call to action for participants to join and contribute to this important new initiative.

# Highlights of the Discussion

## Session 2: Update on the Work of U4SSC Thematic Groups

**Cristina Bueti,**
U4SSC Secretariat; Counsellor, ITU

The second session, moderated by Cristina Bueti, U4SSC Secretariat, provided updates on the ongoing work of the U4SSC thematic groups. This session focused on the latest developments across the different thematic groups.

**Ramón Ferri,**
Co-leader of the Thematic Group on City Platforms

Ramón Ferri provided updates on the Thematic Group on City Platforms, which serves as a global forum to explore how ICTs and digital technologies are enabling cities to become more sustainable and intelligent, with city platforms at the core of this transformation. The group will continue its work under Working Group 6 on "Data and APIs in Smart City Platforms" led by Leonidas Anthopoulos (Greece) and will also start working on Working Group 7 on "Smart Destination Platforms" led by Sandra Carvao (UN Tourism) and Laura Flores (SEGITTUR).

**Okan Geray,**
Chair, U4SSC; Leader of the Thematic Groups on AI in Cities and Digital Well-being

Okan Geray provided updates on the Thematic Group on Artificial Intelligence, which develops guidelines for the effective and sustainable implementation of AI solutions in cities. The group led by Digital Dubai will continue its efforts with Working Group 2 on Autonomous Cities and will also initiate new Working Groups 3 on AI-Driven KPIs Measurement and 4 on FAIR Cities – Fostering AI for Inclusive and Responsible Urban Environments led by Soumaya Ben Dhaou (UNU-EGOV). Additionally, Dr Geray presented the ongoing work of the Thematic Group on Digital Wellbeing, which is focused on creating a digital wellbeing framework and compiling compelling case studies.

# Highlights of the Discussion

**Vahid Khatami,**
Leader of Thematic Group on Lessons Learned From Building Urban Economic Resilience at City Level During and After COVID-19

Vahid Khatami presented the group's workplan on enhancing urban economic resilience through a series of workshops. It offers tools for crisis recovery, financing strategies, and sustainable urban planning, with opportunities for U4SSC participants to contribute and expand its impact. This thematic group will be led by Vahid Khatami (UNECE).

**Barbara Kolm,**
Co-Leader of Thematic Group on Enabling People-Centred Cities through Digital Transformation

Barbara Kolm provided key updates on the Thematic Group focused on Enabling People-Centred Cities through Digital Transformation. This Thematic Group, led by Cristina Bueti (ITU), Barbara Kolm (Austrian Economics Center) and Okan Geray (Digital Dubai), will continue its work through several dedicated Working Groups:

- **Working Group 1:** Setting the Context for People-Centred Digital Transformation, led by Okan Geray (Digital Dubai) and Victoria Papp (BOMA)
- **Working Group 2:** Developing Policy Benchmarks for the Digital Transformation of People-Centred Cities, led by Bettina Tratz-Ryan (Gartner).
- **Working Group 3:** Conducting Digital Transformation Assessments of People-Centred Cities, led by John Smiciklas (Morguard) and Gamze Geray (Adjunct Faculty at Middlesex University Dubai).
- **Working Group 4:** Creating Guidelines for Achieving Net Zero in Cities Through Sustainable Digital Transformation led by Leonidas Anthopoulos (Greece).

Additionally, a new Working Group on Intergenerational Procurement for People-Centred Cities has been established and will be led by Warren Smith (Dangersmith SARL & CURSHAW) and John Davies (Department for Business and Trade, United Kingdom Government). This group aims to develop a Model Policy on Intergenerational Procurement to support city administrations in meeting the needs of people and the planet, both today and for future generations, through digital transformation. During her intervention, she suggested creating a professional network for women in cities with a special focus on female mayors.

# Highlights of the Discussion

## Session 3: U4SSC Management Team and Annual Work Plan 2024-2025

**Aarth Saraph,**
Associate Programme Management Officer, United Nations Environment Programme

Moderated by Aarth Saraph, Associate Programme Management Officer at the United Nations Environment Programme, this session focused on planning U4SSC's future.

As part of the planning, he presented a proposal for a new Thematic Group on "Sustainable Digital Transformation in Buildings and Urban Energy" and provided details on planning of the proposed working group 1 on "Digital transformation of power grids in cities towards affordable clean energy transition" which is expected to produce a report on experiences and lessons learned. The proposed deliverable will build on analysis of case studies of the digital transformation of power grids to support transition to clean and affordable energy in cities to be conducted under UNEP project "Digital Demand Driven Networks Initiative" (3DEN). The new thematic group will have two working groups and will be led by UNEP and BOMA.

**Cristina Bueti,**
U4SSC Secretariat; Counsellor, ITU

Cristina Bueti, U4SSC Secretariat, presented the Annual Work Plan for 2024-2025, outlining strategic objectives and upcoming projects. The focus of the next year's work will include further advancing digital transformation strategies, promoting green digital action, and continuing efforts to foster city-level resilience.

It was agreed to establish a network of professional women in cities with a special focus on female mayors. In addition, the following new Thematic Groups were approved along with the U4SSC workplan:

- **Future Foresight for Cities**
  - Future foresight for cities encompasses anticipating and preparing for urban challenges and opportunities. It entails a forward-looking approach to envision potential futures and develop strategies to shape them. By understanding potential future scenarios, cities can make informed decisions, invest wisely, and build resilience. This thematic group will be led by Digital Dubai.

11

# Highlights of the Discussion

- **Sustainable Digital Transformation in Buildings and Urban Energy**
  - As cities worldwide strive to become more resource-efficient and climate-resilient, the built environment plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainability goals. The proposed Thematic Group on Sustainable Digital Transformation in Buildings and Urban Energy aims to address this need by exploring the integration of digital technologies with sustainable building practices. This thematic group will be led by UNEP and BOMA.
- **Social Sustainability in People-centered City Governance**
  - This Thematic Group aims to identify quantifiable social sustainability indicators and establish a measurement methodology for their implementation in urban governance. By developing a digital decision support system prototype, the project seeks to create a tool that balances social, economic, and environmental sustainability, providing a comprehensive framework for cities to integrate social sustainability into their local governance actions effectively. This thematic group will be led by the City of Kristiansund.
- **Digital public infrastructure for cities**
  - This Thematic Group aims to act as a platform to bring cities stakeholders, DPI implementers, digital public good DPI component and other related stakeholders to discuss the technical requirements of DPI for cities to enable digital transformation at scale in an inclusive, and safe environment. This thematic group will be led by NTRA (Egypt).

## Closing Remarks

**Okan Geray,**
Chair, U4SSC

The meeting concluded with a closing speech by Okan Geray, Chair of U4SSC, who thanked participants for their continued support and dedication to making cities smarter, more sustainable, and people-centred. The day's discussions highlighted the significant progress of Thematic Groups, the launch of two key deliverables, and the initiation of new activities for the coming year. Emphasis was placed on maintaining the momentum and leveraging collective expertise to advance smart, sustainable cities.