

Resilient Cities and Human Settlements Working Group

Draft Workplan (April 2025 - May 2026)

Introduction

The Resilient Cities and Human Settlements Working Group (RCHS-WG) was established to develop and implement a coherent and cross-cutting approach within GEO to advance the use of Earth observations in support of urban resilience and sustainable urbanization efforts. This mandate is clearly outlined in the RCHS-WG Terms of Reference (2024) and builds upon the foundation established by the Resilient Cities & Human Settlements Engagement Plan (ExCom 54.8, March 2021).

The Engagement Plan, which was approved by the GEO Executive Committee, recognized that "cities are where opportunities lie to serve all existing three engagement priorities" of GEO – climate change, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development goals. It noted that "cities are the sites of the fastest population growth, with more than 2.5 billion new urban residents expected by 2050" and that "urban activities account for about 70% of greenhouse gas emissions." Cities and human settlements therefore represent critical intervention points for addressing global environmental challenges.

The RCHS-WG operates through a dual approach: on one side, translating urban stakeholder needs into specific requirements for Earth observation data, tools, and services; and on the other side, translating advancements in Earth Observation science and technology into practical solutions for human settlements. Through this balanced approach and collaboration with other GEO Working Groups, the RCHS-WG ensures Earth observation data effectively supports informed decision-making for urban resilience, economic and social prosperity, and environmental sustainability, particularly aligning with the New Urban Agenda and other global frameworks.

This expanded workplan outlines three primary activity areas, with detailed rationales, activities, and timelines through December 2025. Each activity area supports the core objectives of the RCHS-WG and responds to specific needs identified through engagement with urban stakeholders and the broader GEO community.

1. Documenting Urban Stakeholder Earth Observation Requirements

Rationale:

The RCHS-WG operates through a dual approach that converges on developing coherent, cross-cutting Earth observation solutions for urban resilience. As noted in the Resilient Cities & Human Settlements Engagement Plan, there exists a crucial gap in translating needs in the urban domain into requirements for Earth observation data, tools, and services. Many governments, particularly at the local level, are unfamiliar with using Earth observations to support policy, planning, and operational decisions. By systematically documenting urban stakeholder requirements, the RCHS-WG can ensure that EO resources are aligned with actual needs, creating more effective and usable solutions for human settlements of all types and sizes.

Suggested activities:

1. Develop a comprehensive methodology for capturing urban EO requirements, specifically drawing on experience from eShape and EuroGEO frameworks
2. Create a robust heat resilience case study (knowledge product) through targeted interviews with city networks (R-Cities, C40, ICLEI) and GHRS project partners
3. Document the technical specifications and Earth observation data requirements emerging from the heat resilience case study
4. Develop a framework template that can be applied to translate other urban challenges into specific EO data specifications

Timeline:

- Apr-May 2025: Develop methodology based on [eShape](#)/ EuroGEO approaches *part-complete*
 - Aug - Nov 2025: Conduct targeted interviews with city networks and GHRS partners focused on heat resilience in support of GEO's emerging Work Programme activity, the Global Heat Resilience Service (part-funded by the EC's Horizon Europe programme) *identified potential interviewees*
 - Nov - Dec 2025: Document technical specifications and EO requirements for the heat resilience case study
 - Jan - Feb 2026: Develop highlight report and requirements framework template
 - March 2026: Present findings at iClimateAction Heat Resilience user-workshop (virtual / hybrid)
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2. Supporting International Policy Processes and Events

Rationale:

The New Urban Agenda serves as the overarching policy framework for GEO's engagement in urban resilience, as highlighted in the Engagement Plan. [UN-Habitat has recognized GEO as an important partner for collaboration, particularly in developing indicators for reporting on SDG 11.](#) The RCHS-WG has a unique opportunity to strengthen this relationship and extend engagement to UNESCO, the World Bank, and other international organizations by demonstrating GEO's commitment to addressing urban challenges through Earth observations. This engagement priority aligns with international frameworks and supports the upcoming review of the New Urban Agenda implementation by the UN Secretary-General in 2026, representing a critical opportunity for GEO to contribute.

Suggested activities:

1. Develop a matrix of engagement opportunities for 2025-26 categorized into:
 - In-person events (forums, conferences, workshops)
 - Written policy contributions (flagship reports, policy briefs, technical guidelines)
2. For in-person events:
 - Identify and prioritize key urban-focused international events for 2026
 - Select **one** high-value event for 2026 engagement
 - Form a small working group of volunteers to develop a specific proposal for GEO RCHS-WG representation
 - Coordinate GEO participation and messaging with relevant GEO Work Programme activities
3. For written policy contributions:
 - Map upcoming flagship reports and policy documents from UN-Habitat, UNDRR, UNEP, World Bank, etc.
 - Identify **one** strategic document where RCHS-WG input would have significant impact
 - Recruit working group volunteers with relevant expertise to develop contribution proposal
 - Coordinate with GEO Secretariat on formal submission process

Timeline (*all tbc, depending on events and processes selected*):

- October 2025: Complete matrix of engagement opportunities for both in-person events and written contributions
 - December 2025: Select one priority in-person event and one priority written contribution; issue call for working group volunteers
 - November - December 2025: Form volunteer teams and develop specific proposals for selected opportunities
 - January - April 2025: Finalize engagement plans and begin preparations for both types of contributions
 - May - July 2025: Execute engagement at selected in-person event; submit written contribution
 - August 2026: Evaluate outcomes, document lessons learned, and develop initial strategy for 2026 NUA review contribution
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3. Fostering Knowledge Exchange and Communication

Rationale:

The GEO Work Programme contains numerous activities that address urban issues both directly and indirectly, as noted in the Engagement Plan. These include GEO Human Planet, Global Urban Observation and Information, Earth Observations for Climate Change Impacts on World Heritage Cities, and others. However, these efforts require better coordination to maximize impact and avoid duplication. Furthermore, the RCHS-WG offers an opportunity to leverage city-level networks, raise awareness around Earth observation's capacity to build urban resilience, attract funding, and deliver services to individual cities and stakeholders. Enhancing knowledge exchange across the GEO community and with external partners is essential for realizing the full potential of Earth observations for urban resilience.

Suggested activities:

1. Initial Working Group Engagement Phase (pre-GEO Global Forum): *complete*
 - Establish coordination mechanisms with the Climate Change Working Group, Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, and the Data Working Group
 - Conduct joint planning sessions to identify urban resilience synergies across working groups
2. GEO Work Programme Mapping Phase (post-Global Forum):
 - Following the May 2025 GEO Global Forum, conduct initial mapping of urban resilience activities in the new [GEO Work Programme 2025](#)
 - Identify potential collaboration opportunities and gaps
 - Create a visual representation of urban activities across the GEO Work Programme
 - Organize one technical exchange workshop in late 2025 bringing together urban-focused GEO Work Programme activities (Virtual / *potentially this could be held at the Human Planet Initiative conference*)

and validate mapping of knowledge resources above, identifying additional resources / gaps etc.

- Document outcomes to inform 2026 activities linked to GEO Knowledge Hub enhancements

3. Knowledge Exchange Development:

- **Develop a dedicated "Urban Resilience Hub" page within the GEO Knowledge Hub** – working closely with the [GEO Data & Knowledge Working Group](#) to centralize all urban resilience-related tools, data, and applications identified, including those emerging through Work Programme mapping
- **Create standardized content curation protocols** including metadata templates, review processes, and liaison relationships with relevant GEO Work Programme activities for regular updates
- **Design user-centered navigation pathways** with filtering by SDG 11 targets, urban challenges, and stakeholder groups (city planners, disaster risk managers, policy makers)
- **Establish sustainable maintenance procedures** including quarterly review cycles, contributor guidelines for RCHS-WG members, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms
- **Integrate outputs from heat resilience case study** and future urban challenge studies into the hub structure for ongoing expansion

Timeline:

- Apr-May 2025: Initiate coordination with other GEO Working Groups; conduct joint planning sessions *complete*
 - October 2025: Following the GEO Global Forum, complete mapping of urban resilience activities in the new GEO Work Programme
 - November 2025: prepare visual representation of urban-resilience themed activities
 - Dec 2025: Organize and conduct engagement workshop; document outcomes and plan 2026 engagement
 - Jan – Mar 2026: work with GEO Data & Knowledge Working Group to develop dedicated Urban Resilience Hub page within GKH
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Leadership and Implementation

The RCHS-WG will implement this workplan through a co-chair structure, with each co-chair taking primary responsibility for one of the three activity areas. Working group members will be invited to volunteer for specific activities based on their expertise and interests.

The workplan will be reviewed quarterly to assess progress and make adjustments as needed.

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