

The UNECE Publication “COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region” Goals, Targets and Actions

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SUMMARY

In the UNECE region, approximately 50 million people live in informal settlements, with a large percentage of them in Southern and Eastern sub regions. These settlements typically have dense populations, limited services, including water supply and sanitation, inadequate transport, unregistered residents, inadequate housing with insecure tenure, and unregistered land rights. Residents generally have low incomes, and often have few resources, precarious employment, limited digital connectivity, and include many of society’s most vulnerable inhabitants. Overcrowding and housing conditions in informal settlements pose particular challenges to States to ensure the protection of their residents from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, residents of marginalized communities are often inadequately included in public vaccination campaigns, and frequently show greater hesitancy to get vaccinated. The economic impact of the pandemic has particularly hit residents of informal settlements, and further increased the many other challenges in their day-to-day lives. Addressing the specific challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic within informal settlements is urgently needed. The pandemic does not recognize legal or physical boundaries, and crosses these borders easily. As such, building resilience to pandemics within informal settlements also helps the neighboring communities. The UNECE publication “COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region”, developed under the guidance and supervision of the UNECE Working Party on Land Administration, was endorsed at the eighty-second session of the UN Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management in October 2021 and is now ready for implementation.

As recently noted in a UN-GGIM report, “the pandemic has not only created new challenges, but reinforced the pre-existing obstacles to realizing the SDGs - structural inequalities, socio-economic gaps, and systemic challenges and risks and a lack of timely fundamental data and enabling technologies to measure and monitor what is happening where, when, and how”. The measures

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proposed in this COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region (Recovery Action Plan) deal with both new challenges, created by COVID-19, and pre-existing ones. The integration and formalization of these informal communities is a key step in the longer-term resilience-building process.

This Recovery Action Plan, targeted at national and local governments in the ECE region, uses all accumulated experience and provides an extensive list of goals, targets, and actions that can be advanced by governments, local authorities, residents, community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to help mitigate and/or prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also designed to help build back better the informally developed areas, and to achieve greater resilience to future pandemic risks, while simultaneously helping to achieve the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a particular focus on SDG 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements.

This paper briefly presents the structure of the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region, its goals, targets and actions. The paper also refers to the UNECE Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions. The formalization and integration of informal constructions within the economy, formal land markets, the legal framework, land planning, and appropriate administrative adaptation will help achieve resilience and the SDGs. Cadastral data, buildings registers and address register data were among the most useful datasets during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, it is important for each building to be included in the cadaster. Special attention is paid on the presentation of the accompanying Policy Briefs covering a number of special topics. These relate to how we consume and extract natural resources for the built environment, as well as how we engage with nature.

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