

Online Workshop

Formalizing the Informal to Protect Residents in Informal Settlements

Wednesday, 17 June 2020, 14:30-17:00 CEST, WebEx

Opening remarks

Ms. Doris Andoni, Chair,
UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

- It is my honor to welcome you to this expert workshop jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG).
- The *Guidelines on the Formalization of Informal Constructions* that will be presented for the first time today are the most recent example of the excellent collaboration between FIG, the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and its Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA).
- I would like to use this opportunity to warmly thank FIG for the productive, long-term collaboration. Such cooperation and exchange of knowledge is an effective way of contributing to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of land policy and the promotion of sustainable land management to more readily achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.
- I am also glad to see that for today's online workshop, participants are connecting from around the world. This is particularly relevant as I trust that these *Guidelines* can be useful to countries across and beyond the UNECE region. And that they can support Governments in implementing the *Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing*. This Charter was endorsed by UNECE member States in 2015. It is the expression of political will of 56 countries to ensure decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all.
- This expression of political will is ever more important as informal development has become an increasingly urgent matter for the UNECE region. Europe has experienced a rise of urban dwellers who cannot afford to pay rent, with housing costs rising particularly rapidly in the more prosperous large cities. This is especially the case for the Southern and Eastern parts of the region, while Western European countries are said to have more than six per cent of their urban dwellers living in insecure housing conditions.
- This led to an increase of settlements built outside the formal system of laws and regulations that ensure tenure, legal ownership, and safe, resilient structures. The importance of tackling this issue is undeniable and addressed in several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG target 1.4 stresses that governments should ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property and inheritance. SDG 11 stresses that cities and human settlements should be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- The current exceptional situation of the COVID-19 pandemic has put even more pressure on achieving SDG 11. It has also thrown the spotlight on housing and cities – as many countries requested their citizen to 'stay at home' to stay safe.

- So, I am pleased to see that today's workshop looks at recommendations for Governments how to keep the most vulnerable safe during the time of the pandemic. And that it explores economic benefits of legalizing informal settlements which can become particularly relevant during the post-COVID recovery.
- How cities can better adapt, prepare and respond to emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic will also be the theme of the Forum of Mayors. I would like to use this opportunity to invite you all to join us for this event – virtually or in person - on 6 October 2020 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

I wish you a successful workshop today.
Thank you for your attention.