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### Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

#### Working Party on Land Administration

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#### Land administration during the COVID-19 pandemic

## Draft COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region

### Note by the Bureau of the Working Party

#### *Summary*

Addressing the specific challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic within informal settlements is urgently needed. To this end, in 2020, the Working Party agreed to elaborate the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region. This Recovery Action Plan, targeted at national and local governments in the ECE region, provides an extensive list of goals, targets, and actions to help mitigate and/or prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also designed to help the ECE region to build back better, and to achieve greater resilience against future pandemic risks..

Accordingly, the Bureau initiated this work to develop an emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic to recover better based on the relative importance and anticipated impacts on informal settlements in the ECE Region. At its twelfth session, the Working Party will be presented with the draft COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region and discuss the next steps to promote its implementation.

The Working Party will be invited to (i) request the Bureau to finalize the Recovery Action Plan, considering the outcomes and discussions and reflecting the comments received during the session; (ii) endorse the draft Study with some updates to be agreed by the Bureau after the session; and (c) approve the publication of the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region as an official publication (in English and Russian, digital and print).

Once finalized, the Recovery Action Plan will be presented to the eighty-second session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management in October 2021 for endorsement.

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## Executive Summary

In the UNECE region, approximately 50 million people live in informal settlements<sup>1</sup>, with a large percentage of them in Southern and Eastern subregions. 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.

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.*”<sup>2</sup> The measures 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.

It is urgent to address the specific challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic within informal settlements, while also addressing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This *Recovery Action Plan*, targeted at national and local governments in the ECE region, 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, 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.

The integration and formalization of these informal communities is a key step in the longer-term resilience-building process. Colour-coding is used in the Regional Action Plan to visually distinguish different goals: immediate emergency-focused goals; short-term emergency-related goals; intermediate-term goals (blended-resilience and emergency-focused) and long-term goals (resilience-focused).

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context.* Viewed at: <https://undocs.org/A/73/310/Rev.1>.

<sup>2</sup> UN-GGIM (2020). *COVID-19: Ready to Respond. The Role of the Geospatial Community in Responding to COVID-19.* Viewed at: [http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19\\_Ready-to-Respond.pdf](http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf).

The Recovery Action Plan refers to the UNECE *Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions*<sup>3</sup> the separately prepared *Policy Briefs*<sup>4</sup> covering a number of special topics; and the *Assessment Reports* prepared for the cities of Tirana, Bishkek, Podgorica, and Skopje. It also relies upon principles discussed within the FAO *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*;<sup>5</sup> the UNECE *Policy framework for sustainable real estate markets*<sup>6</sup> and the WHO *Housing and Health Guidelines*<sup>7</sup>. The Recovery Action Plan is furthermore informed by the obligation of national and local Governments under international human rights law to realize progressively the right to adequate housing for all, without discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

The format of this document is built around nine broad Policy Areas, each of which begins with a main Goal for that Policy Area. Under each Goal, there is a number of Targets. These are essentially secondary goals, under the main one. Each Target includes a number of individual Actions to help achieve these Targets. The nine Policy Areas are as follows:

*Policy Area 1 - Geospatial, land rights, tenure, resource allocation and justice*

*Policy Area 2 - Involvement of local communities, and local action*

*Policy Area 3 - Basic data needs, telecommunication and information technology*

*Policy Area 4 - Physical infrastructure, water, sanitation and energy services*

*Policy Area 5 - Social and infrastructure services*

*Policy Area 6 - Stay-at-home recommendations, culture and vulnerable groups*

*Policy Area 7 - Food, basic consumption and distribution*

*Policy Area 8 - Environmental concerns, green spaces, recreation and social events*

*Policy Area 9 - Buildings, construction and land planning*

These Policy Areas cover a wide range of key topics related to the pandemic response and the achievement of the SDGs. The primary focus is on how to mitigate and prevent pandemic-related harm to the residents of informal communities. 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.

Pandemic prevention, resilience and mitigation can be accomplished through key actions by local and national governments and communities. To achieve these, good governance and management of land, best use of the built environment, and comprehensive, inclusive, fair and efficient supply of various services are essential. These actions relate to how we consume and extract natural resources for the built environment, as well as how we engage with nature.

The integration of informal constructions within the economy, formal land markets, the legal framework, land planning, and appropriate administrative adaptation will help achieve resilience

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/guidelines-formalization-informal-constructions>

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://unece.org/housing/post-covid-19-recovery>

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/policy-framework-sustainable-real-estate-markets-0>

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>

<sup>8</sup> See Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and relevant reports of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing on informal settlements and the COVID-19, A/73/310/Rev.1, A/75/148. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/73/310/Rev.1> and <http://www.undocs.org/A/75/148>

and the SDGs. 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 building register, whether it is registered or not in the cadaster. Lastly, successful recovery actions will pay close attention to how best to involve local communities, make logical adjustments in social behaviours in response to a pandemic, and build individual as well as collective resilience in these difficult and unprecedented times.

The Recovery Action Plan for informal settlements and the work at community level should be viewed in parallel with other urban and rural community development needs and activities. In rural areas, a focus on safe and sustainable agriculture, rural development, and the diversification of the rural economy should incorporate the concepts discussed herein.

There are several cross-cutting themes throughout the proposed actions. They are discussed in more detail within the cross-cutting themes section, and the relevant policy areas. The generalized cross-cutting themes relate to similar actions, considered and applied across many of the individual Policy Areas, and deserve special attention. They are as follows:

- a) *Data collection and management*: Appropriate decision-making relies upon adequate, appropriate, reliable data.
- b) *Communication and promotional plans*: Consistent, accurate, inclusive and timely messaging is critical at every step.
- c) *Participation plans*: Effective local engagement, and public participation are necessary.
- d) *Resource allocation and integration*: An effective strategy should incorporate integrated solutions.
- e) *Economic benefits, local and political awareness and will*: Success can be achieved with sustained political and resident support.
- f) *Gender equality, diversity and disability*: to ensure that the specific needs are taken into account through gender analysis, gender-and-age disaggregation of data, and gender-targeted actions.

The implementation of a Recovery Action Plan may vary greatly from country to country and from one informal settlement to another. It should, therefore, be based on an assessment of the local needs, the changing nature of the pandemic, the shifting political/social will, the availability of resources, and other factors on a case-by-case basis. The timing of potential interventions should be described flexibly. Priority levels should be balanced between local realities, and careful consideration of costs, benefits, and risks.

This Recovery Action Plan shows that appropriate interventions can simultaneously have health, safety and other socioeconomic benefits. The twin goals of increased pandemic resilience, and the achievement of the SDGs can be advanced simultaneously. Additionally, a country's disaster preparedness can make all the difference; therefore, greater integration and formalization of the informal communities within the broader formal markets is a critical step in the process of achieving greater pandemic resilience, alongside a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.

## INTRODUCTION

*Cities face many grave serious threats, with the COVID-19 pandemic being the most immediate one. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals will help mitigate or prevent many of these dangers. Their achievement can also advance human society along the path toward a more sustainable, just, and inclusive future. These challenges are especially acute within informal settlements, whose living conditions brings often unnecessary suffering to their residents. Their inhabitants may be stronger exposed to pandemics and environmental risks and their social and economic exclusion may be further entrenched if national, regional and local Governments do not address those challenges swiftly and prudently in close collaboration with their residents. Governments at all levels must remedy the root causes of informality while also confronting the pandemic threat head on, in the journey toward a brighter and sustainable future.*

An estimated one billion urban dwellers live in informal settlements worldwide, approximately 50 million of whom live in the UNECE region. These settlements have been built outside the formal system of laws and regulations that ensure tenure, legal ownership and safe, resilient structures.<sup>9</sup> The problem is particularly acute in the Southern and Eastern parts of the region where, in some countries, the percentage of informal constructions amounts to 20 per cent to 30 per cent in some urban areas.<sup>10</sup>

Informal development is best described as a spectrum of formality<sup>11</sup>. Part of the solution is for policy makers to have a deeper understanding of the nature, types, and socioeconomic consequences of various types of informal constructions. The categories of informality can be described by:

- (a) Type and nature - title or ownership informality and/or construction or use informality;
- (b) Extent - from single dwellings to small estates, and whether these have a significant economic effect; or
- (c) Type of building improvements - property type, such as single-family home, multi-floor apartment building or flat, or retail, industrial, office or special-purpose building.

Causes of informal development include major political changes coupled with rapid, often uncontrolled urbanization, lack of available and affordable housing, poverty, internal migration,

<sup>9</sup> UNECE (2019). *Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions*. Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/guidelines-formalization-informal-constructions>

<sup>10</sup> Balkans Sub-regional Stakeholder Workshop: *Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region*, held on 9 December 2020. Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/events/balkans-local-stakeholder-workshop-post-covid-19-recovery-action>

<sup>11</sup> UNECE (2009). *Self-made cities*. Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/self-made-cities>

### ***Formalization efforts in countries in the UNECE region***

*Informal development is not new for the UNECE region; several formalization projects have built on experience in countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey but have not managed to fully eliminate the phenomenon. In the early 1990s, the number of informal settlements in the region increased rapidly, as a result of the political and economic changes in Eastern Europe and former-Soviet countries.*

*In general, informal settlements are not registered in property registration systems and, as a consequence, cannot not be mortgaged, formally transferred, inherited, or rented. Moreover, most of these informal settlements are not subject to taxation.*

*European and Central Asian land reforms and property registration projects were at risk, mainly because such a large amount of dead capital is a challenge to national economies and, equally important, the missing information about properties, constructions, property rights, as well as about people who live and work in these settlements, impedes sound decision-making by Governments, experts and residents.*

*Therefore, many countries were encouraged to initiate formalization projects.*

*These include:*

- *Privatizing occupied state-owned land to occupants, and determining compensation for occupied privately-owned land;*
- *Providing ownership titles, and registering them in property registration systems, allowing property transactions and mortgages;*
- *Revising zoning and planning procedures, and developing regulations and standards;*
- *Regularizing and upgrading informal settlements; and*
- *Applying controls on, and upgrading, individual constructions.*

*International research has examined the causes and types of informal housing developments in countries such as Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo,<sup>8</sup> Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro and the Republic of North Macedonia, and assessed the Governments' policies to address this challenge. Despite efforts, several complex reasons have delayed the formalization progress in some areas, some quite difficult to be addressed. These include: weak private-property rights due to established policies; the question of how environmental standards can be upheld in a fair and equal manner for all; and the issue of how environmental protection can be included in programmes related to the formalization of informal settlements. Based on this assessment, the UNECE Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions were compiled and published in 2019.*

conflicts, marginalization, natural disasters, and cumbersome authorization processes for home modernization and improvement. The list also includes the absence of good practice policies by States, and their failure to adopt pro-growth planning. Other factors include limited affordable-housing policies, private-sector weakness, lack of political will to develop land policies facilitating recognition of existing tenure and private property rights to aid transition from

centrally planned to market economies, and the failure or reluctance of state agencies to implement measures supporting economic reforms.<sup>12</sup>

Densely populated, inadequate or limited basic services, including water supply and sanitation, overcrowded or no public transport, unregistered residents, limited access to health care and educational resources, inadequate housing and insecure tenure, and unregistered rights on land are all common challenges in these informal communities. Living in informal settlements disproportionately affects certain groups. Informal settlements often sit on the periphery of urban areas, lacking access to markets and/or resources. For women, for example, this can heighten barriers they face in accessing livelihood opportunities. Home-based workers also face challenges to entrepreneurial activity (Chant, 2014).

Residents often have few resources, precarious employment, limited digital connectivity, and include many of society's most vulnerable residents, including women, girls, minorities, and people living with disabilities.

There are many factors that make hotspots for pandemic spread e.g., restaurants, pubs, clubs, homes for the aged, ski resorts, family celebrations, meat processing factories, shopping centers, informal communities could also be potential hotspots. Limited demographic, health, and geospatial data in these settlements make it difficult to understand the local dangers or apply any recovery policy in a fast and efficient manner. Informal settlements can become one of the many hotspots of the pandemic, similar to venues such as at work, or within family networks. The lack of the informal residents' integration into society, the mistrust that stems from such inequity, and both inadequate communication and information-sharing make these areas potential sources of pandemic risk and social unrest.

Women in informal settlements spend more time and energy accessing basic services than other urban counterparts, limiting their ability and time to earn through paid employment (UNFPA, 2007). In addition, the prevalence of male-biased land tenure policies and restrictions on women's rights to own property decrease the likelihood of alternative housing options. Poor-quality housing, eviction and homelessness can also increase the risk of insecurity and sexual violence (Chant, 2013; and McIlwaine, 2013).

Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. They may experience barriers to implementing basic protection measures, such as handwashing and maintaining physical distancing for several reasons: lack of accessibility of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities; a reliance on physical contact to get support; inaccessibility of public health information; or being placed in institutional settings which are often overcrowded and unsanitary. These barriers are exacerbated for those living in informal settlements and/or affected by humanitarian emergencies. Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of developing more severe health conditions and dying from COVID-19. They have greater health requirements and poorer health outcomes.

Urgent action is needed to enable residents of informal settlements to stay safe and healthy, and thus increase resilience to any future pandemic. Formalization projects can help overcome some of these resilience challenges, while also helping to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

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<sup>12</sup> UNECE (2019). *Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions*.



Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal settlements are particularly vulnerable to the impact of disease outbreaks by the very nature of how people live within them, their general lack of planning and the common physical inadequacies in service provision, limited access to sanitation and hygiene services, density, energy efficiency, transportation networks, etc. Disease-monitoring and containment can be particularly difficult due to a lack of adequate geospatial and demographic data that could be used to inform appropriate policy response and fully understand the risks these communities face.

This Regional Action Plan, complemented by the *Guidelines for formalization of informal constructions*<sup>13</sup> addresses the dynamics of the risks faced by the residents of informal settlements. The need for the formalization of informal constructions is critical to the achievement of the SDGs and for pandemic resilience. Integrating these informal constructions into formal land markets provides clear ownership and security of tenure through titling, and through this, greater economic security and flexibility for residents. It can give residents of informal settlements, and in particular women, greater access to credit and mortgages, and allow for more efficient use of their limited resources. It helps remove barriers to the deeper inclusion of both informal settlement residents (human capital) and land capital within the formal employment and land markets, improving resilience and potential growth for all of society in the process.

Formalization is, therefore, a tool to increase security of tenure and ownership rights<sup>14</sup>, increase economic growth, and to protect and promote human rights. After, or in parallel with, formalization, urban and infrastructure upgrading can simultaneously help achieve growth targets, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs, and Building Back Better from the COVID-19 pandemic. This applies to both formal and informal land markets alike, and ensures a more sustainable future for all.

It is the responsibility of national, regional and local governments to improve living conditions for those marginalized through formalization, mitigate risk in relation to environmental, structural or other risks, and support residents in upgrading their housing, if possible. This would ensure the realization of the right to adequate housing, including healthy housing, for everyone and, therefore, also protect much better against any future pandemic. First and foremost, it would protect the people living in these communities, and also everyone else. Formalization of these marginalized communities is also of paramount importance to Building Back Better.

This publication received input from the members of the UNECE nexus *Sustainable and smart cities for all ages*, including experts on several policy areas, each of whom contributed to detailed thematic policy briefs that supplement and expand various key topics discussed within this Recovery Action Plan.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the publication benefited from assessment reports

<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/guidelines-formalization-informal-constructions>

<sup>14</sup> FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Policy briefs on the topics (on Energy, Nature-based Solutions, Water and Sanitation, Urban Mobility and Innovative Financing) are available at: <https://unece.org/housing/post-covid-19-recovery>

prepared for four cities on formalization efforts and the situation in selected informal settlements in these cities.

## **I. A PANDEMIC-RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE VISION OF THE FUTURE**

The populations living in informal settlements are somewhat forgotten, invisible and underserved. The potential of these communities can be unlocked with the implementation of proper plans and political will.

In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A sustainable future can only be achieved if leaders, professionals, and local residents work together to protect us better from the current and future pandemics and other impending crises, including climate change, that the global community faces. The 17 SDGs are a framework for action to transform the world, to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. 2020 marks the Decade of Action, with only ten years left to achieve the SDGs. In this regard, any effort to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic needs to contribute to Building Back Better. By joining efforts, land, labour and capital can be used efficiently, and the rights and dignity of all peoples can be protected so that no one is left behind as societies evolve throughout the twenty-first century.

Informal settlement residents have much more in common with their formal neighbours than differences. The integration of these informal settlements within the formal markets can help overcome challenges and enrich lives. Some of these challenges and their related goals are obvious. These include how pandemic hotspots can be minimized, sustainability goals achieved, infrastructure upgraded, land titles awarded, tenure made more secure, housing shortages decreased, basic services made more available, and water/energy issues abated. Other more subtle problems and solutions may be harder to discern; these include risks being minimized, greater harmony achieved, gender inequality lessened, human rights adequately respected, protected and fulfilled, integration and greater efficiency achieved, and social tensions eased.

### *Building an inclusive, just, and sustainable world for all*

Striving to reach these outcomes requires appropriate geospatial, demographic, gender-sensitive, scientific, crowd-sourced, and other information to uncover and understand the problems.<sup>16</sup> There needs to be the political willingness to proceed in an appropriate, just and inclusive fashion. Effective leadership and communication across the board can engage the local communities at all levels. It is for these core reasons that this *Recovery Action Plan* was compiled. Mitigation of the risks posed by COVID-19, and increased resilience within informal settlements against future pandemics and natural disasters are the goals. Simultaneously, it is proposed that a formalization programme be applied, with appropriate registration and titling, to secure tenure and protect the human rights of informal residents. This could provide a pathway

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<sup>16</sup> UN-GGIM (2020). *COVID-19: Ready to Respond. The Role of the Geospatial Community in Responding to COVID-19*. Available at: [http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19\\_Ready-to-Respond.pdf](http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf)

toward greater integration of the informal settlements and residents within every aspect of society.

## II. STRUCTURE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Structure

*The structure of this Plan identifies the Goals, Targets, and Actions key to a successful pandemic response. Appropriate local implementation should be, and is, expected to vary in timing, priority, and scope, based on the physical and social realities in the communities.*

The Recovery Action Plan outlines nine policy areas, each of which contains one goal. These are divided into more concrete targets and, in turn, targets are divided in actions to be taken to reach those targets. Direct mention of time frames was excluded, as successful implementation will vary greatly based on the sociocultural context, political/local will, (financial) resources, and the immediacy of the pandemic and other threats faced by an informal community.

While specific time frames were not presented, so as to allow for greater flexibility at the local level, the general timing ideas are as follows:

- a. **Emergency goals** (emergency-focused)  
Categorized targets and action points to reach and secure short-term goals; *Loosely defined as those to be accomplished in less than 6 months.*
- b. **Short-term goals** (emergency-related)  
Categorized targets and action points to reach and secure short-term goals; *Loosely defined as those to be accomplished in less than 1 year.*
- c. **Intermediate-term goals** (blended-resilience and emergency-focused)  
Categorized targets and action points to reach and secure intermediate-term goals. *The greater complexity is expected to loosely require 6 to 18 months to accomplish.*
- d. **Long-term goals** (resilience-focused)  
Categorized targets and action points to reach and secure long-term goals. *The greater complexity and nature of the solutions are expected to loosely require more than 1 year to accomplish, often 1 to 5 years.*

Individual targets/actions are colour-coded according to the immediacy of the components. A **RED** circle means a target/action that has important emergency components; a **GOLD** circle means short-term components; a **GREEN** circle indicates those with important intermediate-term components; and a **BLUE** circle indicates those with important long-term components. Many of the targets and actions will show multiple coloured circles, indicating that important aspects of them cover a variety of emergency, short-, intermediate- and/or long-term components.

## Guiding Principles

*This Recovery Action Plan incorporates a flexible, comprehensive, and people-centred approach to developing appropriate COVID-19 pandemic responses. It is crucial that any successful plan and implementation programme be appropriate and accepted by the local community. The character of the informality, local culture, governmental, legal, scientific, environmental and economic realities need to be balanced. Local community members, officials and other stakeholders must communicate effectively at every stage of the plan to achieve the greatest benefits.*

Many United Nations publications cover topics directly related to the guiding principles of this Recovery Action Plan. Of particular note are the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* and their *Guiding Principles of Responsible Tenure Governance*.<sup>17</sup>

This Recovery Action Plan is also based on the following guiding principles:

### (a) **Comprehensiveness**

No group of measures can achieve complete protection from all pandemics (or, by extension, the myriad threats that face humanity in the twenty-first century). The optimal outcome, therefore, is a comprehensive and integrative set of policies and behaviours that balance the dangers of a specific pandemic viral threat (COVID-19 in this instance) with the realities of our world. Specifically, we focus on those that are central to informal settlements in the UNECE region, where risks are more acute, information is limited, and often political will, social will or trust is less. There should be a balance between these realities and culture, competitive societies, the economic engines upon which they depend, science and the limitations of natural resources of the earth. The actual state of affairs, at a given moment (viral specifics, spread risks, number currently infected and hospitalized, death rate, etc.), balanced with the socio-environmental realities, should drive our decision-making at all levels.

Simultaneous cross-sectoral approaches are necessary. One-dimensional solutions may lead to undesired or unexpected results. These often address symptoms of the problem, and can miss the complexity of the blended sociocultural, socioeconomic, and related pure science nature of the myriad threats facing us and the planet upon which we depend. This Recovery Action Plan should, therefore, be considered in its entirety. All goals and targets should be understood in the context of a need for targeted national and local policies, logistical solutions, appropriate resource allocation, creative scientific problem-solving, a need for good leadership, and sociocultural adaptability. This is true even if their operational implementation may (and should) differ widely across the globe. We should employ the range of tools at our disposal in differing and locally appropriate ways to reduce pandemic threat, understanding that no culture, people or informal settlement is the same.

<sup>17</sup> FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

**(b) Learning and flexibility**

Policies should encourage and embrace best practices and emerging innovations. They should allow for flexibility in approaching various informal settlement challenges. All pandemic threats will raise issues related to culture, society, faith, economics, and governance, and so too should the solutions. The greater the direct connection to how people live and what they value, the more adaptive the response will need to be to pandemic or other wide-scale threats, if interventions are to be successful.

Overregulation should be avoided, as it can lead to unintended negative effects. It can also ignore the necessary procedures for pandemic safety, due to a lack of resources and capacity, as well as “social will” and communication, especially in poorer countries. A flexible, balanced set of solutions needs to be implemented, adapted to the nature of the pandemic or natural threat and local realities. This relies on appropriate, evidence-based, appropriately toned and consistent communication at all stages.

**(c) People-centered and human rights-based approach<sup>18,19</sup>**

It is vital that pandemic response be interlinked with social policies that promote the well-being of society; respect, protect and fulfil human rights; support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; help reduce social inequalities that can lead to unrest; and scientifically address the true nature of the threat. To consider any world-scale health issue (or even climate change) in narrow technocratic terms is inadequate, from both a social and political point of view. To view things narrowly invites opposition and failure despite the best of intentions.

There are large differences across the UNECE region with respect to levels of economic development, legislative and organizational structures, housing and the built environment, informality, leadership, culture, history, faith, resources, and climatic conditions. This is even more true for informal settlements relative to other communities. Informal settlements are at even greater risk, relative to these aforementioned factors, due to generally weaker social cohesion, lower incomes and resources, precarious employment and basic utility access, sociocultural biases, and usually lesser access to education and necessary basic services. The Recovery Action Plan has universal relevance to the UNECE region, and it is urgent that most goals and targets be properly incorporated into policies at both the national and local levels. However, to achieve optimal outcomes, local socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and geographical contexts must be taken into account into any implementer's thought processes when designing and implementing locally specific measures regarding pandemics and threats. The effective participation of those living in the informal settlements in the decision-

<sup>18</sup> *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context.* Available at: <https://www.undocs.org/en/A/73/310/rev.1>

<sup>19</sup> *The Human Rights in Cities Handbook Series: Volume I: The Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing and Slum Upgrading.* Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/the-human-rights-in-cities-handbook-series-volume-i-the-human-rights-based-approach-to-housing-and-slum-upgrading>

making on response measures and policies affecting them, from the stage of policy design, through implementation, up to evaluation, is crucial.

### III. CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Cross-cutting themes permeate this Recovery Action Plan. It is useful to discuss them separately so that they are in the forefront of any implementer's mind. They should be carefully considered throughout all policy areas when determining the appropriate responses and priorities within the context of the local realities, risks, and challenges. The most obvious cross-cutting concepts are dealt with below.

#### **Data collection and management**

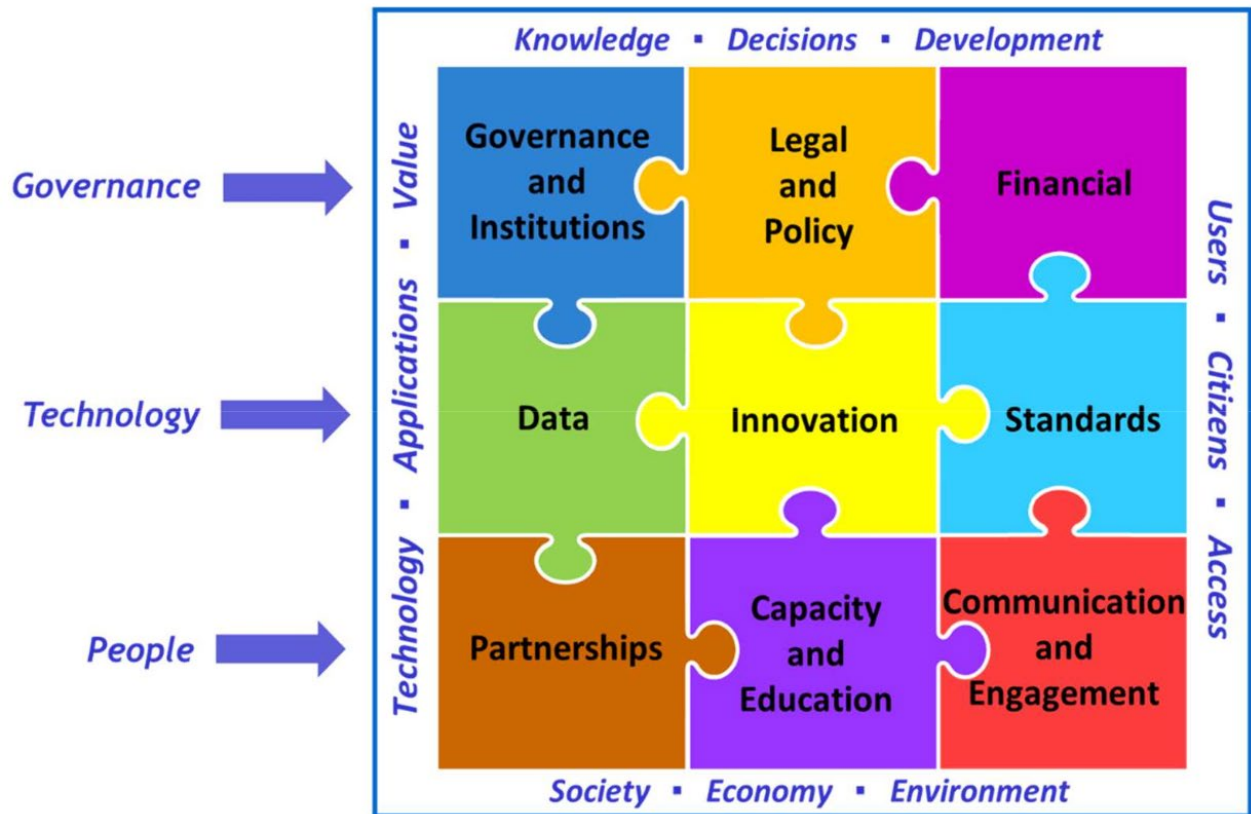
Throughout all Policy Areas, the constant theme is to collect, study, analyze and plan data. Without the appropriate information, it can be difficult to tell the difference between the causes and symptoms of problems. A lack of sufficient, up-to-date data, including gender-disaggregated data, and information may make it impossible to perform a cost/benefit analysis as part of the determination of implementation priorities. Compiling, maintaining, and updating databases, maps, registries, demographics, and street addressing allow for more appropriate planning and responses to various socioeconomic challenges, and ensure that responses are effective and differentiated, according to the needs of diverse populations. Within informal settlements, information on these factors is, to a great extent, missing. This greatly hampers the ability of local authorities and stakeholders to make and implement appropriate and timely plans. Information registers should be improved, using modern tools and techniques to collect missing information. Thus, compiling appropriate information to support effective governance and developing systems to retain and update this information over time (particularly title registers and cadastral maps and data) can provide subtle but potentially vast benefits to all of society.

The *UN Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF)*.<sup>20</sup> provides a wide range of strategic pathways, which should be in place in order to ensure that the data are available at the time they are most needed. The *UN-GGIM Ready to Respond. The Role of the Geospatial Community in Responding to COVID-19*.<sup>21</sup> publication also gives useful guidance regarding relevant data management.

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://ggim.un.org/igif>

<sup>21</sup> UN-GGIM (2020). *COVID-19: Ready to Respond. The Role of the Geospatial Community in Responding to COVID-19*. Available at: [http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19\\_Ready-to-Respond.pdf](http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf)



*Figure 1 - The Integrated Geospatial Information Framework is anchored by nine strategic pathways and three main areas of influence.<sup>22</sup>*

Additionally, adequate evaluation and monitoring systems should be put in place. These will help ensure that responses and resources are allocated as intended, solutions applied to identified issues are evaluated for effectiveness (and adjusted, if necessary) and the potential for corruption and misunderstanding is minimized. An appropriate evaluation and monitoring programme can help achieve optimal outcomes for many interventions.

### **Communication and promotional plans**

Messaging, gathering consensus, disseminating instructions, and providing data (for example, general data, health/safety, scientific and policy information, communication of community benefits, and transparent registry data which support efficient land markets) can all be thought of as part of a larger open *communication plan*. All of these are critical aspects discussed throughout the Policy Areas.

The messaging methods, tone, language and communication depth could make the difference between the success or failure of any individual component of the overall Recovery Action Plan. Effectively communicating this information, gathering consensus, and providing transparency

<sup>22</sup> UN-GGIM (2018). *Integrated Geospatial Information Framework. Part 1: Overarching Strategic Framework*. Available at: <https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/8th-Session/documents/Part%201-IGIF-Overarching-Strategic-Framework-24July2018.pdf>

are critical components of most socioeconomic actions, and this Recovery Action Plan in particular.

Good communication strategies are also key to achieving the maximum potential benefits of the Recovery Action Plan, as well as the greatest benefits from the formalization, upgrading and integration of informality within the formal markets. Appropriate, socially sensitive, and accurate science-based messaging and the use of inclusive channels of dissemination of the messaging can minimize dissent, and help retain “will and positive local perceptions” as pandemic fatigue settles in. It can decrease mistrust, increase compliance with health/safety measures, and speed up the proper implementation of all plans.

### **Participation plans**

An effective Recovery Action Plan will require the acceptance and participation of most of the residents. It will require the support (or at least a lack of obstruction) of most of the local authorities, limited political opposition and involve the professional community. It needs to *balance* social, economic, environmental, cultural, and medical priorities. This balance is likely to change over time, as the population gains more information and acceptance of safety measures, which will be somewhat offset by frustration and pandemic fatigue. Gaining and retaining wide participation relies upon the other cross-sectoral themes. This is especially true regarding consistent and appropriate messaging that is built upon good data and appropriate science, appropriate resource allocation, inclusiveness, and a sustained local/political will. Engaging and understanding the needs and priorities of the local informal settlement residents, as well as the broader political realities, is critical to gaining and sustaining sufficient participation for maximum effectiveness.

### **Resource allocation and integration**

The appropriate timing and integration of the Policy Areas should be based on local community, cultural, socioeconomic, political, legal, scientific/medical engagement, and a very realistic analysis of risks, benefits, and available resources. Unrealistic plans, even with the best of intentions, are likely to fail, and may even be counterproductive. Resources are never infinite, and should be utilized pragmatically where and when appropriate. This will vary greatly based on the local context and, thus, priorities should be set with these in mind, to withstand the pandemic threat and achieve the SDGs timely. The achievement of some of the Goals and Targets will also build upon each other, with ever-greater socioeconomic, mitigative and resilience benefits when accomplished in tandem. This means that the achievement of some goals will feed off each other, accelerating benefits because some aspects are interrelated, and begin a process of accelerated growth (exponential growth is not impossible).

### **Economic benefits, and local and political awareness and will**

The achievement of many of the goals and targets listed in the policy areas will have a combination of immediate benefits, as well as longer-term improvements in health, safety, and economic resilience. These are often subtle and difficult to ascertain. However, the step-by-step removal of systemic governance, institutional, effectiveness and efficiency barriers can have a



profound positive effect on a community. These barriers are any aspect of law, social convention, governance structure, data insufficiency, lack of equity, discrimination, bias, prejudice, lack of knowledge both among politicians and society, lack of ethics and other systemic factors that prevent or distort rational choices. These create inefficient or less-effective resource allocation (land, labour and capital) and typically reduce economic performance. Wherever possible, these systemic barriers (inefficiency points) should be identified and minimized.

Additionally, the Goals, Targets and Actions herein touch on a wide range of technical issues, to meet the broad range of challenges informal settlements face. Many of these require a high degree of complexity and/or niche expertise. The necessary capacities (technical, institutional, and organizational) to carry out these actions may, or likely may not, already exist. There will likely be a need to train individuals and strengthen the capacities of institutions to meet these specific challenges.

Legal empowerment of the people, formalization leading to the integration of dead or inefficient land and labour capital (allowing for easier access to credit), achievement of the SDGs, and the enhancement of effective governance will almost assuredly provide great benefits over time. As such, obtaining, and then retaining, local communities' trust and political will is critical to the success of this Recovery Action Plan and to obtaining the previously described potential benefits. How to obtain and retain such will requires well-informed, flexible and effective leadership at key levels within the local community, local authorities and, possibly, within some levels of national government.

### **Gender equality, diversity and disability**

The Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settings includes such cross-cutting issues as gender, diversity and disability, to ensure that the specific needs of women and girls, LGBTQ, women and girls with disabilities, living in informal settings, are taken into account through gender analysis, gender-and-age disaggregation of data, and gender-targeted actions. Gender analysis looks at the impact of emergencies on women, girls, men and boys, and verifies that the recovery response meets their distinct needs and priorities. Gender equality is integrated into the situational analysis to ensure that gender-based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by interventions, and that greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted. Gender analysis is based on sex-disaggregated data and qualitative information with regard to disparities between men and women in each sector. It informs gender-specific interventions, targeting women and girls, LGBTQ, and women and girls with disabilities living in informal settings to enable them to participate in, and benefit equally from, recovery efforts.

## **IV. POLICY AREAS**

### **Policy Area 1 - Geospatial, land rights, tenure, resource allocation and justice**

*Goal 1 Informal settlements are formalized and brought into the economy and formal land-markets in a just, efficient, and sustainable manner, allowing for broader*

*socioeconomic progress, justice, and the empowerment of the people, especially those in vulnerable and marginalized situations.*

## **Rationale**

The right to adequate housing is an internationally recognized human right. Adequate housing refers to more than just a roof over one's head; it means housing that ensures security of tenure and prevention of evictions, and that is, and remains, affordable, ensuring the habitability of housing and access to public services. In the developing world, about 33 per cent of urban dwellers live in informal settlements, and there are more than 50 million informal dwellers in the 20 member States of UNECE.<sup>23</sup> Lack of security or tenure, the frequent concentration of inadequate sub-standard housing in informal settlements, and limited or lacking public services burden the lives of residents of such settlements and increase their vulnerability to COVID-19. At the same time, their residents interact with, and provide usually vital services to, the population of the greater region. While working in the formal and informal job market, usually in professions that do not allow for digital work from home, or physical distancing on the job, residents of informal settlement are usually more vulnerable to the virus. In the long-run, not only they, but the entire society, are at greater pandemic-related health-safety risk. Ensuring the protection of residents of informal settlements benefits the entire society and should, therefore, be one element of a comprehensive COVID-19 prevention strategy that also protects the local economy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public authorities should avoid any measures that would worsen the lives of residents of informal settlements; in particular, they should refrain from executing any evictions, in order to ensure that people can shelter from the virus in their homes, whether living in formal or informal housing.<sup>24</sup> Evictions increase the risk of spread of the virus and also contribute to homelessness, making the situation of affected persons worse. Often, evictions only relocate the problem of informal and substandard housing to neighbouring communities. While, occasionally, relocation of some households living in informally erected housing cannot be avoided, such relocation should only take place after all alternatives have been explored. If relocation cannot be avoided, it should only be implemented in full conformity with international human rights standards, as set out in the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement (A/HRC/4/18, Annex I), which set out procedural safeguards and international standards for community participation in the planning and execution of any eviction or relocation. They also underline the need to provide alternative housing or land and, if appropriate, compensation for loss of property.<sup>25</sup>

In general, formalization of informal housing, complemented by participatory and rights-based in-situ upgrading of informal settlements, is the approach that the United Nations, including

<sup>23</sup> UNECE (2019). *Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions*.

<sup>24</sup> *Special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing: COVID-19 Guidance Note, Prohibition of Evictions*, 28 April 2020. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/SR\\_housing\\_COVID-19\\_guidance\\_evictions.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/SR_housing_COVID-19_guidance_evictions.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> See also OHCHR/UN-Habitat (2014). *Forced evictions, Fact Sheet No. 25/Rev. I*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS25.Rev.1.pdf>

UNECE, UN-Habitat and OHCHR, endorses, and this approach should underpin all core actions to be implemented under this Recovery Action Plan.<sup>26</sup>

Informal constructions represent “dead capital”; they usually cannot be registered, taxed, transferred, rented, upgraded, or mortgaged. These constructions are not part of the normal economic cycle, which, in turn, encourages more informal work arrangements. This limited integration of both land and labour markets in the broader economy has pervasive and very costly negative effects on poverty, GDP, risk, real estate values, tax revenue, human rights, and sustainability. Attention should also be paid that to the fact that women are differently affected by the limited integration into land and labour market than men, as they are more likely to be employed in the informal sector<sup>27</sup> and they have less access to land.<sup>28</sup>

These assets should be urgently transformed into more “productive” capital, to break the cycle of poverty and suffering. An expanded real estate tax base and the valuation industry upon which efficient markets depend is also within reach with a successful formalization programme<sup>29</sup>. This can be accomplished partially through unleashing an efficient, equitable, and just land and labour market in the informal settlements, and partially through other necessary infrastructure upgrades, legal and institutional reforms, and human rights interventions.

COVID-19 and health safety risks are compounded by a general lack of geospatial data, the fragility of the residents’ economic realities, and limited demographic information, which hamper effective responses. Access to credit, secure tenure and superior demographic and geospatial data allow for greater resources for residents, better protection of their rights to housing, more organized and effective health and disaster responses, and easier testing and contact tracing.

The COVID-19 crisis requires short-term responses to limit pandemic spread. That begins with obtaining good demographic and geospatial data (the first step to formalization) within informal settlements. For this, crowdsourcing, volunteered geographic information, volunteer work, etc. should be considered. Existing informal settlements urgently need to be formalized and integrated into the economy, affordably and inclusively, to maximize benefits, better protect the residents from pandemics and natural disasters, and ensure no one is left behind. Title provision should be highly prioritized. Formalization of informal development provides greater resilience to pandemics. Consistent land policies, good governance, and well-established institutions and systems remove incentives for new informality.

Flexible and affordable tools to limit the creation of more future informal constructions should accompany the process of formalization. Such tools need to address the root causes of

<sup>26</sup> UN-Habitat (2017). *The Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing and Slum Upgrading*. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/the-human-rights-in-cities-handbook-series-volume-i-the-human-rights-based-approach-to-housing-and-slum-upgrading>; *Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, report on the right to housing and informal settlements, A/73/310/Rev.1*.

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid\\_impact\\_on\\_women\\_9\\_apr\\_2020\\_updated.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RealizingWomensRightstoLand.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> For more information, see Sections 16 and 18 of the FAO (2012) *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

informality in parallel with, or after, the formalization process. They should be structured in such a way as to encourage people to follow official regulations and laws and build affordable constructions within the existing systems. When this is not possible, social and/or affordable housing programme options should be explored. For example, the State may adopt affordable housing policies and provide state land, services and material to beneficiaries, requiring in exchange compliance with regulations for these self-made constructions with the supervision of the responsible agencies. This should be tested with pilot programmes, to align demand from residents, and the willingness and flexibility of state actors. Done properly, this could help minimize future informality by addressing some of the root causes of existing informal constructions (the State covers some of the costs created by a systemic imbalance in affordable and appropriately located housing by supplying land and providing services). This would also limit the possibility of improper incentives to developers of informality who may try to take advantage of formalization procedures.

Many countries have not developed adequate policies, institutions, and capacities to prevent informal development and, by extension, limit the harm that is related to insecurity of tenure, eviction and displacement, substandard and unhealthy housing and the related higher exposure of their residents to pandemic threats or other disasters. There is a need to improve relevant land-related institutions, and provide widely available professional education. Large-scale improvement in institutional processes, social inclusivity and protection, security of tenure, housing, land and property rights, and the integration of health safety into geospatial data all assist in protecting informal settlement residents and empower them to improve their lives.

**Target**      **GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles**

- 1.1      *Land registries and geospatial databases include informal communities and ownership rights, thus fostering greater socioeconomic integration between formal and informal residents over time.*

**Actions**

- 1.1.1      *Identify* the current coverage, quality, and scope of available geospatial data sources, and what needs to be accomplished for complete coverage with all necessary information obtained and maintained.
- 1.1.2      *Map and include* informal constructions in the geospatial database. All residents and their homes can then be included and considered regarding service provisions, human rights protection, disaster preparedness, legal matters, health safety, mobility logistics and infrastructure plans for the broader formal and informal communities. Crowdsourcing, Volunteered Geographic Information and smartphone applications could be used as possible low-cost sources of this data.
- 1.1.3      *Effectively engage* the local community, along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in the design of questionnaires, census, surveys, etc., in the organization of mapping, and in addressing programmes to prevent informal settlement residents perceiving these exercises as a threat to their houses and lands. *Organize* volunteers and team leaders, and provide simple training courses

on how to use mapping methods. A simple open-source application tool and an appropriate base map should be used (e.g., cellphone-based, orthophoto, air photo, or crowdsourced maps, such as OpenStreetMap).<sup>30</sup>

- 1.1.4 *Supplement* existing demographic information with a wide variety of health statistics for residents (gender, age distribution, disabilities, pre-existing health conditions, urban density, health care access, etc.) as well as data for measuring housing conditions that affect health, such as insulation, heating, indoor and outdoor air quality, and safety and quality of drinking water<sup>31</sup>, to better plan and allocate resources. For urban upgrading programmes, additional data should be collected on housing affordability, access to water sanitation, access to health care, schooling, public transport etc.
- 1.1.5 Make all geospatial and related sociodemographic information *transparent, accessible, affordable and easy to manage*, so that Government, professionals, the business community, stakeholders, and inhabitants alike can make better-informed decisions.

**Target** GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles

- 1.2 *Informal constructions are formalized* in a fair, efficient, transparent, and inclusive manner, empowering residents, and supporting social and economic inclusivity and better pandemic responses.<sup>32</sup>

**Actions**

- 1.2.1 *Identify* the extent of informal/unregistered constructions/parcels and the current coverage, quality, and sustainability of the registration system, tenure types, cadaster, and legal structure for the formal and informal markets.
- 1.2.2 *Concurrently build* political will for dealing with formalization, and gather community information and support. Involve local experts, professionals, and community leaders.
- 1.2.3 *Analyse* the existing informality, classify the informal constructions, understand their effects on transportation networks and perform a cost-benefit study to decide what scope and strategy process for formalization intervention are most appropriate.

<sup>30</sup> For more information, see collection of land tools on mapping tenures in informal settlements by the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN). *Access to Land and Tenure Security*. Available at: <https://glt.n.net/access-to-land-and-tenure-security/#>

<sup>31</sup> WHO (2018). *Housing and Health Guidelines*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see UNECE (2019) *Guidelines for the formalization of informal constructions*. Available at: <https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/publications/guidelines-formalization-informal-constructions>

- 1.2.4 *Develop* a formalization strategy and communication plan. Evictions should be prohibited unless they cannot be avoided, an Eviction Impact Assessment<sup>33</sup> has been conducted and an appropriate, inclusive and human rights-based resettlement plan is already in place that is in conformity with the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions<sup>34</sup>. If no alternative to resettlement can be identified, and the resettlement takes place during the COVID-19 or future pandemic emergency period, only evictions and relocations directly aimed at preventing contagion among residents should be allowed. Furthermore, the expected benefits for affected populations and the measures to mitigate the risks of contagion should be clearly and publicly outlined.
- 1.2.5 *Prepare the framework* for formalization (*define the following*: areas/zones and categories of buildings eligible for formalization; protected areas; necessary legal action; appropriate actions; the registration process; title provision; and necessary fees. *Determine* the institutions that are involved and how). Ensure that women have equal access to the formalization process.
- 1.2.6 *Prepare the legal framework and carry out* fit-for-purpose formalization and dispute-resolution processes (processing documents, mapping all structures, registering titles, processing legal actions, collecting fees if appropriate, and monitoring the process). Legislation and technology need to be developed in a generally parallel fashion, as each relies upon the other.

**Target** GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles

- 1.3 *The legal rights and justice systems are efficient and adequate for the needs of informal residents.* They should support sustainable development, foster greater efficiency and integration of labour and land markets, defend housing, land and property rights, be responsive to capital markets, be equitable and inclusive, and provide adequate protections for human rights, gender equality and dignity.

**Actions**

- 1.3.1 *Identify* the existing legal structures (laws, policies, procedures, fees, time to process, fairness, and case backlog, if appropriate). This should be viewed through the lens of human rights and gender equality-related issues that apply to informal settlement residents, tenure security, and emergency- and health-service provision.
- 1.3.2 *Determine* what legal problems are likely to occur to hinder both formalization and the integration of the informal and formal communities. Legal problems related to the lack of rights to adequate housing, gender-based discrimination and

<sup>33</sup> For more information, see UN-Habitat and OHCHR (UNHRP) (2014). *Assessing the Impact of Eviction: Handbook*. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/assessing-the-impact-of-eviction-handbook>; and UN-Habitat (2011). *Losing your Home, Assessing the impact of eviction*. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/losing-your-home-assessing-the-impact-of-eviction>

<sup>34</sup> See A/HRC/4/18. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/housing/guidelines\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/housing/guidelines_en.pdf)

lack of access to health-service provisions should also be identified, taking into account that a pandemic will exacerbate any existing inequality or shortcomings.

- 1.3.3 *Draft a legal strategy* to bridge any gaps in the existing legal framework to support title provision and registration, formalization, supplement existing relevant human rights initiatives, if any, and ensure adequate pandemic-related health services, with special regard to the needs of women and girls.
- 1.3.4 *Engage* with local community leaders, health providers, stakeholders, professionals, and local government in workshops and round-table discussions to minimize opposition, increase participation, advance human rights and gender equality protections, and invite new ideas.
- 1.3.5 *Build political will* for the legal changes needed to support the new legal strategy. Both economic and health-safety benefits should be emphasized.
- 1.3.6 *Understand and prepare* for legal and criminal challenges in informal communities, related to lockdowns, partial or full closures, and short-term economic/unemployment problems causing spikes in certain types of crime, and unusually difficult law enforcement issues.
- 1.3.7 *Draft, implement and enforce* new legal procedures.
- 1.3.8 *Provide titles and registration services* to strengthen housing, land and property rights and empower women, men, boys, and girls.<sup>35</sup>
- 1.3.9 *Raise awareness* and improve education on the benefits of formalization, so that so that all informal settlements are formalized and mapped.
- 1.3.10 *Develop* appropriate procedures that allow the smooth and regular updating of all collected geospatial and demographic data, address all structures, and keep registries current. This fosters economic progress and integration with the formal markets, in time decreasing social tensions.
- 1.3.11 *Allow* for any required structural improvements of the formalized constructions, transport network, green spaces and neighbourhoods during and following the formalization process, including for the specific needs of women, girls and people living with disabilities. Provide incentives for the residents, so that these improvements do not impede near full coverage for formalization to be achieved. Extensive reliance on inspections, permits, fees, long wait times, general mistrust, and high construction or efficiency standards could all threaten a formalization programme severely, if not carefully considered and balanced with the goal of complete coverage and integration.
- 1.3.12 *Ensure* that an affordable, accessible judicial complaint mechanism exists for residents. This could be embedded in a land dispute resolution mechanism, and it should entail free legal aid for residents that are directly and/or indirectly

<sup>35</sup> *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context*, Rolnik, R. Available at: <https://www.undocs.org/en/A/HRC/25/54>

affected by the formalization of tenures and who cannot afford private legal counsel. This mechanism should also be able to be used to suspend evictions pending complaints from affected individuals.

**Target** GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles

- 1.4 *The institutions underpinning land, labour and capital economics and health-safety concerns are improved to better address pandemic threats and foster economic growth, fairness, and inclusivity.*

**Actions**

- 1.4.1 *Identify the private and governmental institutions that form the foundation of the economy and health provision (institutions described herein relate to: regulations for taxation and professions; health-safety, property rights and tenure security; credit and banking; effective governance and corruption; and the legal system and justice).*
- 1.4.2 *Understand how these institutions interact, and identify barriers and bottlenecks impeding efficient, fair, and affordable provision of these institutional services. Barriers and inefficiencies in their interaction impede empowerment, equitability, economic progress and, by extension, human rights and health-safety.*
- 1.4.3 *Determine where institutional impediments lie, and prepare a strategy for addressing some of the barriers impeding economic growth (speeding up processes, removing steps, lowering costs, removing corruption, and improving inclusivity), health-safety, and human rights.*
- 1.4.4 *Improve resource allocation, and overcome the challenges preventing the removal of specific institutional barriers to health-safety and economic growth, for formal and informal residents alike.*

**Policy Area 2 - Involvement of local communities and local action**

**Goal 2** *Local community-based organizations, coordinated with a city-level team, respond to the pandemic in coordination with government ministries, and medical, professional, and aid organizations of all kinds.*

**Rationale**

Consistent, rational, transparent, science-based messaging is critical to any appropriate response to a pandemic challenge. Additionally, local government engagement and recommendations should be based on the best medical science data and available resources. Local, national, professional, faith-based, and international aid organizations may also offer crucial coordination and resources. All these sources of aid and information need to be coordinated and accepted at the local community level. To this end, local community leaders need to be informed and involved, as much as is reasonably possible, to achieve the highest compliance with science-based plans designed to protect both formal and informal communities.



There are many ways the informal settlement residents can become involved in safeguarding their community. Organizing and creating local groups to address specific pandemic-related challenges may well be key to limiting viral spread with the least negative impact on local society and the economy upon which they depend. Volunteer groups, trusted by the residents, small-scale home education (pods), local assistance for elderly and at-risk residents, community and faith-based food- or medicine-sharing programmes, and other similar groups can help society's most vulnerable. All of this relies upon community engagement, consistent local messaging based on science, and good coordination between the local community, Government, professional society, and global organizations.

The COVID-19 crisis requires short-term responses, that sometimes contradict local customs and/or religious procedures. Therefore, good coordination between stakeholders and residents is crucial. Consistent science-based messaging, and the creation of local groups to solve specific community-based problems are also recommended. Long-term resilience to pandemics could be enhanced by the creation of plans for empowering specific community-based organizations, plans for alternative small-scale (pod) based programmes as an alternative to larger public and private institutions (such as education, or larger businesses), and coordination and communication plans to enhance the speed and efficacy of pandemic responses, whenever they are needed. Strong support from the local community and faith leaders is crucial for successful pandemic response implementation measures.

## Target

**RED and GOLD circles**

- 2.1 *Social and community groups are relied on, or formed if there is no active community group in the informal settlement that could be mobilized, to respond to pandemic-related threats, engage residents, and address the specific needs of the community.*

## Actions

- 2.1.1 *Identify* the existing trusted community leaders, and social and faith-based groups. *Understand* their level of community involvement, and their preferred approach to safeguarding the community. *Incorporate* these concepts, whenever possible, to coordinate them with an appropriate community engagement plan that does not jeopardize overall success or create unrest.
- 2.1.2 *Encourage* the creation of local task forces to identify specific community needs, infrastructure shortages and pandemic-related issues for further discussion and analysis with medical staff, professionals, and other stakeholders.
- 2.1.3 *Identify, create, or expand* the relevant local authorities and governmental ministries that are critical to the pandemic health response, together with community engagement.
- 2.1.4 *Develop* specific, local community-led plans to address possible problems and shortages in infrastructure, basic goods, water, energy, food, medicine, elderly care, mental health care, addiction, abuse, personal protective equipment, education pods, utilities, and other community-specific issues.

- 2.1.5 *Assist and organize* the city-/town-wide, community-led groups, faith-based organizations, local authorities, and governmental ministries, to address and fund these specific community challenge initiatives.
- 2.1.6 *Coordinate* these local initiatives with the relevant stakeholders, where possible.

**Target**            **GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 2.2 *Local charities, international NGOs, faith-based organizations, and donors cooperate, where possible, to respond to pandemic threats and assist in solving community-specific challenges.*

**Actions**

- 2.2.1 *Identify* the donors, faith-organizations and charities that are interested in assisting in local community pandemic response, and *engage* them with local authorities, governmental ministries, and appropriate local groups.
- 2.2.2 *Engage* international NGOs, donors, faith-based organizations and other stakeholders with local authorities and governmental ministries, and appropriate local groups for effective aid programmes.
- 2.2.3 *Create a plan* to link the NGOs, donors, faith-based organizations, and their resources with the specific local challenges to limit viral spread, mitigate social harm, and protect human rights. The goals of these plans would be based on community-specific challenges and on issues discussed throughout the other policy areas herein, with NGOs and charities as possible funding sources.
- 2.2.4 *Initiate* charity and NGO programmes with appropriate oversight protocols and proper targeting of funding and goals to minimize corruption and waste, and to maximize benefits.

**Target**            **RED circle**

- 2.3 *Community-based information campaigns provide accurate data to informal settlements residents, disseminating such information through the most efficient channels, in a timely manner, and in detail appropriate to the specific local challenges brought on by the pandemic threat.*

**Actions**

- 2.3.1 *Identify* the methods most likely to reach the greatest number of informal settlement residents in specific communities. If specific segments of the population are underserved by typical communication methods, identify a way of overcoming this weakness for critical messaging.
- 2.3.2 *Carry out* the collection of comments, opinion polls, participatory mapping,<sup>36</sup> and crowdsourcing tools, and use remote conferencing tools to facilitate public

<sup>36</sup> “Participatory mapping” means the use of a growing toolbox of techniques that can help members of the public record and share spatial knowledge through the use of participatory methods and cartographic representations, often in digital form.

- participation in designing, monitoring and adjusting plans to deal with specific local pandemic challenges and/or other crisis situations.
- 2.3.3 *Develop* urgent community-specific plans to assist in spreading fact-based, scientific information, and recognize where governmental and aid agency responses are addressing similar issues. These should include community leaders, community groups, social media, and other sources appropriate to the local community.
- 2.3.4 *Supply information to local communities*, including consistent messaging in the appropriate language(s) about key aspects of disease prevention as well as what residents should do if they contract the virus.
- 2.3.5 *Keep societal and political will strong* by a focus on consistent, science-based problem-solving to assist communities to respond appropriately.
- 2.3.6 *Minimize* unfounded governmental mistrust by making plans direct and easy to understand.

### **Policy Area 3 - Basic data needs, telecommunications, and information technology**

**Goal 3** *The people are empowered to cope with a pandemic by leveraging and making the relevant information technologies easily available.*

#### **Rationale**

All sectors of society thrive on having access to reliable sources of information, and informal settlements are no different. Enhancing access to basic data, telecommunications, and information technology, and narrowing the digital divide between the informal and formal communities will help empower informal settlement residents, minorities, women, and society's most vulnerable groups. These technologies can be used to help move people out of poverty, increase transparency, supplement education, boost productivity, and foster the open sharing of ideas that are key to long-term prosperity and growth.

Greater access to data also allows for a coordinated response to pandemics and other disasters. It allows accurate and current information on pandemic risks to be shared in real time with the community. Many different informational, technological, environmental, infrastructural, service and social barriers were identified during COVID-19 pandemic, such as data sharing, data quality, and access to services. Creating a risk register with the supporting legal framework, necessary data, technical platforms, and services is a good way to consider and weigh up the risks facing society.

Public authority instructions on how to protect people and how people can protect themselves can be easily spread. Tele-health, teleworking, tele-education, and online education options are all possible, and can be effective in lockdown periods. These technologies can be crucial to education when schools fully or partially close during high-risk periods. In short, effective communication is critical in any coordinated response to a pandemic. It can help hold society together and keep it functioning, even under severe pandemic threats, when lockdowns, and extreme social distancing are the only viable methods of controlling viral spread. The more

severe the pandemic, the more important information technologies are in keeping society functioning, people working, and society recovering more rapidly.

The COVID-19 crisis (or any future pandemic) requires appropriate short-term responses to control and limit the viral threat. Accurate information on hospitalization, how and where to go, governmental support services, governmental instructions, positivity rates, death rates, where to obtain medical supplies and personal protection equipment, emergency food sources, quarantine protocols, testing, contact tracing, mental health support, education, tele-services, and even basic human contact can and should be provided by these technologies. Long-term resilience to pandemic and disaster threats is enhanced by strengthening the information infrastructure, and planning proactively for a wide variety of challenges. Indirect long-term resilience can also be enhanced by using information technologies to empower residents. This can be accomplished over time by removing socioeconomic barriers to success; combating bias, prejudice, and discrimination; enhancing transparency; and the free exchange of ideas.

**Target**                    **RED and GOLD circles**

- 3.1        *Mobile phone technologies are utilized to their potential* to fill information gaps among residents, provide social contact, and act as a tool for the dissemination of critical information and governmental instructions.

**Actions**

- 3.1.1     *Survey* the current state of radio and mobile phone technologies (quantity, quality, and coverage).
- 3.1.2     *Identify* if there is adequate radio and Internet coverage for this technology to be central to an information dissemination effort, and if there is enough capacity for it to have a much larger role in society and in pandemic prevention efforts.
- 3.1.3     *Utilize* radio and smartphones to transmit basic and necessary pandemic medical information (infection rates, death rates, testing sites, hospitalization and quarantine protocols, contact tracing, health instructions, mapping of communities, understanding mobility patterns for transportation improvement, COVID-19 testing results etc.)
- 3.1.4     *Develop* a smartphone application (or several) to provide and gather most critical information, track cases, inform residents who were in contact with infected people, and make sure that any language barriers are overcome.
- 3.1.5     *Enhance* radio and smartphone penetration in informal settlements to empower residents and strengthen interconnectivity with local, regional, and global information sources.
- 3.1.6     *Create* a tele-health application to allow health-care providers to service informal communities from anywhere. Additionally, create a similar teleworking application to enhance employment opportunities, and an application to analyse mobility patterns to find dangerous hubs and bottlenecks.
- 3.1.7     *Consider and explore* whether radio and tele-education makes sense in these communities and, if so, develop simplified cell phone-based education modules when classroom education is unavailable due to COVID-19-related safety concerns.

- 3.1.8 *Reduce the digital divide, and enhance* laptop penetration in informal settlements to allow women, schoolchildren and students to make use of tele-education if resources allow.

**Target** RED, GOLD and GREEN circles

- 3.2 *Viable decentralized employment and teleworking options* are available, and the affordability of Internet services is expanded in all informal settlements.

**Actions**

- 3.2.1 *Survey* the current state of Internet service technologies (type, quantity, quality, and coverage).
- 3.2.2 *Study* employment patterns in informal communities to determine which sectors are most heavily impacted and *determine* how this would likely affect residents and their ability to weather a pandemic.
- 3.2.3 *Expand* e-service provision by Government and the possibility of teleworking in informal communities, considering both existing community employment and potentially expanding new employment opportunities designed specifically with global and local teleworking in mind. An e-portal for government services should be developed where possible, which allows for more efficient processes, decreases corruption, and improves health-safety through less traffic at government offices.
- 3.2.4 *Decentralize* employment opportunities in small-scale easily socially distanced occupations in the case of a long-term or protracted pandemic where a rethinking of how we live and do business is required.
- 3.2.5 *Examine* workplaces within informal communities, and ensure proper social distancing is possible and, when appropriate, allow for some employees to telework to limit viral spread in the workplace.
- 3.2.6 *Broaden and improve* Internet access across informal settlements to enhance the flow of critical information into these communities, empower residents, and increase their ability to telework successfully. A campaign for providing low-cost computers (donors needed) and smartphones may be needed to increase the viability of teleworking.

**Target** RED and GOLD circles

- 3.3 *Informal settlement residents have easy access to education and communication* from a variety of electronic sources.

**Actions**

- 3.3.1 *Survey* the available electronic information sources (radio stations, social media, applications, websites, etc.) to determine how appropriate they are for pandemic response.
- 3.3.2 *Determine* what supplementary education and communication sources need to be developed to appropriately address the pandemic medical science, community

- level organization, and social/local services (social media platforms, radio, smartphone applications, transportation service tracking, websites, etc.).
- 3.3.3 *Aggressively combat* false and fake information of all kinds, as misinformation undermines all other pandemic responses. These problems become more critical as pandemic fatigue sets in, or if the appropriate health-safety measures begin to cause economic and cultural distress. Consistent, logical, science-based messaging and good leadership are key to success in the dissemination of appropriate and reliable information. When combating false narratives, top-down and bottom-up educational messaging make the truth obvious to the listener.
- 3.3.4 *Encourage and develop* online and radio platforms that allow for societal, cultural, faith-based, health and mental health information, communication, and engagement of the people. Properly designed, these can limit the negative impacts of the pandemic on society.
- 3.3.5 *Provide* online services to combat social isolation, negative mental health, and pandemic addiction effects, and provide new societal, cultural and relationship platforms. While this may not seem critical, if new ways for inhabitants to be social are not introduced, many different types of negative patterns will arise and be difficult to eradicate.
- 3.3.6 *Provide* online alternative school/education platforms suited to the needs of the region. These can be established by NGOs or aid organizations, but local computer, radio and smartphone resources would be needed to access these programmes. This is the foundation for the empowerment of society's youth, and allows greater flexibility for all in this rapidly changing labour/employment landscape.
- 3.3.7 *Establish* an information centre in informal settlements where people can get support and where trained staff pro-actively approaches inhabitants with a variety of campaigns to use online resources to solve local problems and inform residents of critical information.

#### **Policy Area 4 - Physical infrastructure, water, sanitation, hygiene and energy services**

**Goal 4** *The public physical infrastructure, water and sanitation networks, and energy grids adequately, sustainably, and equitably support the informal communities.*

##### **Rationale**

The public physical infrastructure and related services are critical to the health, safety, security, economic potential, societal structure, protection of basic human rights (especially society's most vulnerable groups) and attainment of a better, sustainable, and more resilient tomorrow. Within this policy area, roads, water, sanitation, and energy grids will be primarily discussed. However, telecommunication, railways and public transportation are also important elements to be incorporated.

The physical road networks within informal settlements are often unplanned, too narrow, complex, and sometimes choked in places with debris and garbage. Often, they do not adequately and sufficiently allow for emergency service access, efficient public transportation

usage, and more sustainable mixed modes of transportation (mass transit, bicycles, foot traffic, and cars). This is often due to a lack of governance and planning, and limited availability of geographic, demographic, and spatial information in these areas. Enhancements in the physical transportation infrastructure can help to prevent pandemic spread through greater social distancing; faster and easier access to employment, education, health services and shopping areas; increased economic performance of residents (thus increasing their resilience and ability to adapt to challenges); and easier access for emergency responses.

The provision of safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions is essential for preventing infectious disease outbreaks, including of COVID-19, and for protecting human health during them. However, ensuring access to safe water, and adequate sanitation and hygiene services is a chronic challenge in many informal settlements, even though water and sanitation are well-established human rights.

Often, informal communities are not on the water and sanitation grid, or the systems are not maintained and used properly. Water supply challenges include illegal connections with an irregular, unpredictable supply; leaks; low pressure; unsafe storage; and direct supply from untreated sources. Adequate sanitation is limited where sewerage is unavailable; challenges include the lack of maintenance of septic tanks, the use of shared or private dry pit latrines which are unsanitary and uncovered, and no latrines at all. In these contexts, informal settlements face real challenges to adopt the recommended practices of maintaining hygiene while using common facilities for water and sanitation. Residents usually cannot afford to buy soap for handwashing and disinfectants for the cleaning of the waterpoints, toilets and surrounding areas. To mitigate and prevent pandemic-related harm to the residents of informal communities, all these become essential.

Public service providers, in particular, should abstain from any service cuts in the provision of water, electricity or fuel required for heating; these possible cuts may be provoked by the inability to pay service fees, as many residents in informal settlements may lose their jobs or income during the pandemic. Such measures would be counterproductive to fighting the pandemic. If necessary, utility service provision could be restricted to a particular volume per day, depending on the size of the respective households or the entire population of an informal settlement or section thereof. Fully cutting electricity would exclude fully children from taking part in remote schooling or e-learning that many countries may have put in place, and further reinforce disadvantages and educational exclusion.

Another area that needs to be addressed within informal settlements is access to affordable and modern energy. This includes issues of energy efficiency, renewable energy (including off-grid solutions), and the very careful consideration of minimum performance standards to be imposed over the long term. All of these issues should be addressed when considering the formalization of settlements and their integration into formal markets. This enhances socioeconomic recovery, promotes better resident health following the pandemic, and contributes to urban resilience. This allows for a step-by-step process of improvement over time across the energy-solution spectrum. It enhances resilience while balancing resources, socioeconomic realities, political will, and a pace of upgrades that pragmatically fits the community; it also combats climate change in a manner that can be sustained.

The COVID-19 crisis requires short-term responses to address key pandemic weaknesses created by inadequate road and water/sanitation/energy utility infrastructure. The provision of safe water, sanitation, and hygienic conditions is essential to protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks. Ensuring good and consistently applied water, sanitation, and hygiene and waste management practices in communities, homes, schools, work and marketplaces, and health-care facilities helps prevent human-to-human transmission of the virus.

Important and achievable short-term pandemic, human right and health/safety responses include physical transportation thoroughfares sufficient for necessary disaster response, addressing broader health-safety issues (water and sanitation), plans for safe access to water for pandemic cleaning protocols, and easily achievable energy efficiency targets.

Long-term resilience to pandemics can be enhanced by strengthening the physical infrastructure of the transportation networks, providing safe water and adequate sanitation, and adopting sustainable energy efficiency measures. This is often causally linked to governance, transparency, accountability, and political will. Much of the benefits of these responses are indirect, strengthening and empowering residents over time by making them safer, healthier, more economically viable/flexible, helping achieve more societal balance, especially for women and minorities, and achieving a more equitable balance between formal and informal communities. The attainment of these goals increases resilience to pandemics and other disasters.

## Target RED and GOLD circles

- 4.1 *The physical road and transportation network is adequate and safe for emergency services (paved, necessary width for vehicles, etc.). When possible, it should be flexible enough to safely accommodate differing modes of travel (mass transit, foot traffic, bicycles, etc., as appropriate), sufficient for economic integration with the formal community, and be able to accommodate pandemic-related social distancing.*

## Actions

- 4.1.1 *Map and identify* the characteristics of the physical road and transportation network (type, adequacy and quality of roads, physical barriers, common modes of travel, time/distance relationships to home/work, etc.). Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and smartphone technology can be used to gather this type of information<sup>37</sup>. Sociocultural barriers should also be examined, where significant.
- 4.1.2 *Determine and map* where pandemic threats are highest under normal traffic-flow conditions (human and vehicular). These may be at points of congested pedestrian traffic, in mass transit, or in public spaces. This is the first step to understanding where these mobility flows create greater risk patterns, so urban and transport planning can mitigate the danger.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, <https://digitaltransport4africa.org/> or <https://junglebus.io/references/>



- 4.1.3 *Secure* routes for evacuation, and *ensure* that emergency services can safely and adequately reach the community and remove any physical barriers, debris, or waste. Make a collaborative plan for the relocation of market stalls, tents or other informal land uses that may inhibit the access of emergency services, in consultation with the users/owners, in a manner that allows them to continue carrying out their informal business. In the case of tents or informal structures, provide housing, the relocation of such tents or structures should be carried out in compliance with the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement.
- 4.1.4 *Produce a fit-for-purpose plan* to adjust the traffic flow to remove bottlenecks or allow for improved social distancing in its use, add additional pedestrian, cycle, or roadways to allow for more efficient access to work/home, and improve the quality of the lighting/roads/paths/surface types/connectivity with transport hubs, as applicable, for all types of mobility.
- 4.1.5 *Consider* the feasibility and applicability of different modes of transport to increase energy efficiency, decrease pollution, incorporate public health/safety, and increase social distancing, wherever possible. These create indirect health benefits, increasing resilience, as well as direct benefits through better social distancing; where practical, they should be put into use. *Promote* messages regarding these issues through an effective media/communication campaign.

**Target** GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles

- 4.2 There is *safe, adequate, affordable and equitable access to clean water, sanitation services, and the hygiene infrastructure*. Over time, climate-resilient water and sanitation measures and energy-efficiency measures should be applied when economically feasible or when donor funds become available to fill resource gaps.

**Actions**

- 4.2.1 *Study* and map the existing water and sanitation service provision and the legislation supporting it. *Determine* where the systems are centralized/decentralized, adequate, affordable and equitable, the risks they face (including climate change-related and natural disaster risks), and where they fail, and why (including potential governance bottlenecks to water and sanitation provision).
- 4.2.2 *Identify* and map what groups (minorities, women, vulnerable groups, etc.) or locations are underserved regarding water and sanitation services. A potential tool to be used in this context is the Equitable Access Score-card,<sup>38</sup> a self-assessment methodology developed under the UNECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health in order to support policymakers in establishing a baseline measure of equity, and to support the development of action plans in order processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation.

<sup>38</sup> For more information, see <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=34032>

- 4.2.3 *Develop a fit-for-purpose, budgeted water and sanitation action plan* that balances human rights, design feasibility options, affordability and available upfront and ongoing fee-based funding realities. In terms of ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation, the Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans<sup>39</sup> is available under the above-mentioned UNECE Protocol on Water and Health. It should be noted that, while COVID-19 is an air- and animal-borne virus, another pandemic threat may be waterborne. Under that scenario, there may be little time to adjust to the threat. Investment now may be wise on many levels.
- 4.2.4 *Develop a funding strategy* (Government, donors, NGOs, etc.) and consider that informal settlement residents are unlikely to be able to afford significant upfront development costs (subsidized and backloaded costs can be explored). Low, subsidized, or no-upfront connection fees should be applied.
- 4.2.5 *Affordably facilitate* clean water and adequate/equitable sanitation services within informal settlements through infrastructure programmes, and consider innovative low-cost and smaller-scale solutions if larger infrastructure projects are not feasible, or funding is not available. If necessary, consider installing temporary sanitation facilities (including regular desludging and cleaning services to reduce sharing of facilities).
- 4.2.6 *Expand* the hygienic infrastructure, so that access to public handwashing stations is common; properly located, public, high-traffic spaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly; and handwashing is required in all high-traffic public places and anywhere with likely high viral transmission potential.
- 4.2.7 *Provide a consistent, science-based communication strategy* to ensure that most of the population comply with water, sanitation and hygiene provisions. Water handling and household storage in informal settlements is a key to ensuring water quality. Important considerations include the hygienic maintenance of the sanitation infrastructure and the waste management systems.
- 4.2.8 *Increase* the frequency of solid-waste disposal and management, and *identify* locations for garbage collection, and supplement them if necessary.
- 4.2.9 *Prohibit* service cuts of water and sanitation provision to residents of informal settlements or ensure, at least, that every household, based on its size, has a minimum amount of energy available every day, by installing meters.

**Target** **GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles**

- 4.3 *Adequate energy services are provided to informal settlement residents, incorporating affordability, improvement of energy efficiency (renewable energy where applicable), sustainability and performance standards practical to the specific local context, and achievement of the SDGs as a whole. The*

<sup>39</sup> Available at: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44284>

availability of such energy services creates greater community resilience to pandemic and other threats, greater equity, and stronger economic opportunity, and helps safeguard the human rights of society's most vulnerable.

## **Actions**

- 4.3.1 *Identify* the detailed characteristics of the energy services relied upon by the informal settlement residents. This should include the variety of energy types, efficiency, theft of energy and ways to prevent it, delivery and payment methods, sustainability, what performance standards are mandated compared to what is typically in use, and what is realistically possible given the socioeconomic realities in the specific informal settlement in question.
- 4.3.2 *Prohibit* service cuts of energy provision to residents of informal settlements or ensure, at least, that every household, based on its size, has a minimum amount of energy available every day, by installing meters.
- 4.3.3 *Determine* what economic, social, and health risks are posed by the current characteristics of the energy services. This should include inadequate indoor and outdoor air quality, inadequate water/waste/sanitation services, energy costs, degradation of green spaces, emissions/greenhouse gases, potential fire hazards, and any other identifiable negative factors.
- 4.3.4 *Study* the available opportunities for improving energy efficiency and decreasing risks. This should include more efficient appliances and heating/cooling systems, incentives (including front-end subsidies) for energy efficiency, back-end pricing models (long-term recovery of front-end costs), flexible payment systems, energy cooperatives, the appropriate balance of multiple energy sources, and modern cooking fuels. The cooperative electrification model deserves special attention.
- 4.3.5 *Employ*, where appropriate, renewable energy sources, as well as waste-to-energy and distributed-generation energy options. Distributed generation of energy (especially cleaner options) in informal settlements can be a good early step on the progression up the energy ladder, as it avoids some of the major pitfalls likely faced in expanding energy infrastructure.
- 4.3.6 *Assess* the existing situation of local informal settlements complying with minimum energy performance standards (MEPSs) for buildings, as mandated by national legislation, with a view to setting up a process to support achieving sustainable energy performance according to the SDGs. The appropriate solutions may vary significantly, depending on the local context.
- 4.3.7 *Consider* the possible application of MEPSs in the process of formalization, or in the short- to medium-term after formalization. Achieving MEPSs requires financial resources, and attracting them may not be possible without proper registration and title to a property. In this interim period, in parallel with, or after, formalization, the necessary steps should be considered by the State and the residents. Assistance should be provided by local and national authorities responsible for energy-efficiency improvements and climate-change mitigation

and adaptation, independent of the formalization process. This could take the form of subsidies or fee waivers, and such tools should be a win-win for participating parties. The process of formalization should be accompanied by flexible, affordable tools to limit the creation of more informal constructions, by addressing the root causes of informality in parallel with, or after, the formalization process.

- 4.3.8 *Develop a specific framework and plan* for the co-financing of energy-efficiency measures, relevant infrastructure changes, and renewable energy solutions, where appropriate. These infrastructure upgrades may need to be applied over a flexible time frame if they are to be successfully implemented. Together with education and community engagement initiatives on the efficient use of heating systems and domestic appliances, this should become a core part of the post-COVID-19 recovery strategy in informal settlements, especially considering aspects of critical importance such as sustainable energy supply during the pandemic lockdowns and restrictions.

## **Policy Area 5 – Social and infrastructure services**

**Goal 5** *Essential services are safely and adequately supplied to residents, overcoming the challenges of the pandemic threat.*

### **Rationale**

All communities rely on a wide variety of services that are crucial to modern life. They pervade all of society and the economic foundation upon which humanity depends. COVID-19 places unique burdens upon service provision, and requires a rethink of how one can safely provide necessary services to the public. This service provision must be modified and expanded, often with little warning, to respond to severe health threats focused. It must also be able to adjust for the likely possibility of limited compliance, pandemic fatigue, mixed messaging, mistrust, political backlash, and limited resources.

The provision of services can create potential hotspots for viral spread. This is especially true within informal settlements where the limited resources of the residents, dense populations, and limited demographic and geospatial data can make service delivery more unsafe than in formal communities.

The spread of COVID-19 has vastly increased demand for some services (including emergency services, social services, health care, financial support, temporary quarantine facilities, and vaccine distribution). At the same time, unemployment and underemployment make it difficult for residents and Governments alike to provide the necessary resources and funds to serve the people. All of this is even more severe within informal communities, where residents have less developed services, fewer resources and much less economic and social flexibility than their formal resident neighbours.

It is critical for society and cultures to adjust to pandemic challenges in a manner that balances social, cultural, economic, psychological, and health-safety concerns in a responsible manner. Government, community residents, and stakeholders need to come together and adjust life and

work patterns for the duration of the pandemic threat, in order to minimize loss of life and economic diminution, and preserve as much of society's values and norms as possible.

The COVID-19 crisis requires short-term responses, such as addressing how to limit viral spread by adjusting how services are normally consumed. Vaccination distribution, and planning and proper consistent messaging to support it, are also critical. Service provision in areas where demand is higher due to the pandemic, and adaptively utilization of available resources must be temporarily expanded. Short-term financial funding sources must be found, such as group or individual microfinance, aid agencies and/or development banks to ease financial pressures and spread financial risk. Expanding these into permanent changes could also be prudent.

Long-term building back better solutions to increase service-provision resilience should focus on the efficient distribution of necessary utilities/services, the development of plans for a similar future pandemic where comparable shortages/vaccinations may apply, strategic stockpiling and local manufacturing for some key sectors (personal protection equipment, food, medical equipment, etc.), flexible health-care capacity plans, more digitalization, centralization or decentralization of services, as appropriate, to limit viral spread, development of innovative microfinance, broad decreases in poverty levels, greater protection for human rights, and a rethink of how public administrative services within high-traffic areas can be utilized safely.

**Target**      **RED circle**

- 5.1      *Health-service provision is sufficient to meet public needs<sup>40</sup> for typical demand and has adequate expansion capacity for pandemic response.*

**Actions**

- 5.1.1      *Identify and map* the adequacy of current social protections and health-care services (hospitals, clinics, medical staff, etc.), and their locations relative to formal and informal residents, to ensure equitable care is available. This includes an analysis of the public transportation systems available to the public for such access.
- 5.1.2      *Determine* if the currently provided social protections and health services adequately and equitably support informal communities, minorities, women, the poor, and other vulnerable groups and, if not, address the issue. This includes resolving any access problems for informal residents.
- 5.1.3      *Investigate* all possible options and available applications for the provision of e-medicine instructions/diagnoses, and ways to address shortfalls in social protections, etc.
- 5.1.4      *Estimate* the type and amount of additional social protections and health-care services will be needed under peak pandemic periods. This includes identifying the social, cultural, communication, and economic barriers or trust gaps that may make residents of informal settlements avoid or renounce formal health services.

<sup>40</sup>      *FAO (2020) The contribution of social protection to economic inclusion in rural areas. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb2458en/CB2458EN.pdf>*

There must be an understanding of what alternatives residents are likely to turn to, and what effects that will have. Digital services should be used as much as possible.

5.1.5 *Prepare* to adjust to emergency social protections and health-care provision, with plans in place for rapid scale-up. Hospitalization, including intensive care facilities, testing and vaccination services, are particularly important. This includes storage, distribution, and care. The possibility of corruption should be limited, and black-market activities curtailed in this regard.

5.1.6 *Ensure* that both equitable and physical access to sufficient social protections and health-care services are available to all formal and informal residents, and that there is limited or no bias against minorities or society's most vulnerable. Ensuring access could entail bringing small health-care units (mobile units), where and when needed, if access to hospitals or clinics is difficult for vulnerable groups.

**Target**      **RED and GOLD circles**

5.2 *Emergency service provision is sufficient to meet public needs, and is scalable for rapid expansion* regarding pandemic threats.

**Actions**

5.2.1 *Identify* the adequacy of current emergency services (ambulances, fire rescue, paramedics, other staff, equipment, etc.).

5.2.2 *Determine* if emergency services appropriately reach informal communities, and what barriers may prevent servicing these areas appropriately. This includes understanding the adequacy, or lack thereof, of road paving, street width and congestion of all kinds, garbage or debris, markets or informal uses in the streets, and any other physical, institutional, or social limitations preventing emergency-service provision.

5.2.3 *Map best routes* for physical access to medical centres for informal residents. Short-term specialized solutions may need to be employed if current routes are insufficient to handle peak periods, and mobile health-care units may need to be mobilized.

5.2.4 *Create* a plan for the expansion of emergency services, rapid training of new staff protocols, and conversion of vehicles and equipment to meet peak pandemic threat challenges. Identify in advance where these resources can be obtained, when needed.

5.2.5 *Overcome* or remove any identified institutional, physical, or social barriers preventing access of emergency services in informal settlements.

5.2.6 *Distribute* vaccinations and other emergency pandemic-related health services rapidly, with staff specifically trained for this purpose (paramedic training is likely sufficient).

**Target** RED and GOLD circles

5.3 *Appropriate community-level health education is accepted* at the local level.

**Actions**

- 5.3.1 *Identify* the community leaders, respected local health-care providers, influential community groups and others willing and able to communicate consistent and accurate medical information. Again, identifying social or physical barriers and any trust gaps that might make residents avoid or renounce formal health services is critical. Identifying what health-service alternatives they may turn to, and how popular/respected these are, can allow for creative solutions, incorporating unconventional health resources.
- 5.3.2 *Produce* simple and accurate health instructions to be distributed to all inhabitants, as well as basic, accurate information about the pandemic itself.
- 5.3.3 *Disseminate* the health messaging using the appropriate local channels, languages, and media.<sup>41</sup>
- 5.3.4 *Ensure* accurate messaging overcomes false messaging, and stays consistent even during periods of pandemic fatigue.

**Target** RED, GOLD and GREEN circles

5.4 *The financial wellbeing of the community is preserved, and the pandemic threat to stability is overcome with timely intervention and proper planning.*

**Actions**

- 5.4.1 *Identify* the sectors of the informal community at greatest economic risk from pandemic challenges (public markets, service industries, retail, food services, etc.).
- 5.4.2 *Understand* what governmental resources are realistically available for short-term economic support, and how political will could offer it.
- 5.4.3 *Explore creative solutions* to community underemployment problems (works/infrastructure programmes, expanded home based employment with small incentives, subsidized relocation for employment, training programmes, small-scale manufacture, phone/computer distance work plans, etc.).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative (TUMI) (2020). *Using public transport to create awareness on COVID-19 – a Kenyan invention*. Available at: <https://www.transformative-mobility.org/news/using-public-transport-to-create-awareness-on-covid-19-a-kenyan-invention>

- 5.4.4 *Employ* appropriate sustainable underemployment solutions and aid most likely to be successful and accepted by the local community.

**Target** GOLD and GREEN circles

- 5.5 *The safety, values and culture of the informal settlement residents is preserved* without preventable, undue loss of life.

**Actions**

- 5.5.1 *Identify* the aspects of local cultural life (weddings, funerals, worship, local markets, mass transit stops, regular mobility patterns, etc.) that may place residents at greater pandemic risk.
- 5.5.2 *Adjust* local social activities to preserve the cultural identity and protect the residents of the community.
- 5.5.3 *Overcome* objections to changes in cultural life to protect residents. This must be accomplished with cooperation between local leaders, faith leaders, community groups, and ordinary residents, through proper messaging, predicated on accurate medical science.

**Policy Area 6 – Stay-at-home recommendations, culture, and vulnerable groups**

**Goal 6** *Balancing stay-at-home recommendations with the social and economic realities facing the local culture, diverse populations, and vulnerable groups.*

**Rationale**

Informal settlements and the surrounding communities are populated by a rich, diverse cultural tapestry. Their human right to live and work in safety and dignity should not be compromised by an insufficient response to pandemic challenges. The realities of their lives need to be understood so that appropriate solutions can be implemented.

The cost of a failure in pandemic response inordinately falls upon women and society's most vulnerable groups. Informal settlement residents already face extremely difficult economic choices. Stay-at-home orders exacerbate these challenges, and these residents often already face bias, prejudice, inconsistent justice, corruption, a lack of security of tenure, limited infrastructure and services, and a host of other difficulties. They have few financial buffers, and cannot afford to stay home from work, because they can ill afford to lose income; the loss of a job could be catastrophic. Unless appropriate action is taken, a pandemic only makes these problems worse.

Stay-at-home orders may be the only viable way of combating a pandemic such as COVID-19 when and where cases are spreading rapidly. However, these orders cause havoc within existing social and economic systems. Residents of informal settlements are typically at greater risk of getting infected due to their typical occupations. They are more likely to be severely affected due to less access to health services and balanced nutrition. They also have much less flexibility to act prudently, due to the myriad social, cultural, and economic realities facing them, e.g. living in intergenerational households, where it might be easier for the elderly to become infected.



The COVID-19 crisis requires short-term responses appropriate to both the social and economic realities of the local community, balanced against the specific risks of the pandemic. During peak spread times, normal social distancing and prevention methods may not be sufficient to get the pandemic under control. In these situations, stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, and expanded quarantine policies may be the only way to prevent catastrophe. This may be especially true under the threat of a future pandemic more dangerous than COVID-19. Logical, practical, appropriate, and relatively enforceable stay-at-home procedures must be devised. The majority of the inhabitants need to follow these orders. Thus, community engagement, and plans appropriate to the local realities and culture, need to be central in drafting the procedures. Society's most vulnerable groups (women, children, ethnic minorities, faith minorities, the elderly, the health-compromised, indigent, the economically compromised, etc.) need to be carefully considered in any plan for it to be successful.

**Target**     **RED, GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 6.1     *The cultural and demographic characteristics in informal settlements are taken into account so that diversity and language barriers do not create additional barriers to appropriate pandemic response.*

**Actions**

- 6.1.1     *Understand* the demographics, diverse cultural norms and importance of various social gatherings that may cause an increase in viral spread.
- 6.1.2     *Engage* local community and faith leaders to discuss how to better protect informal community residents where social norms and public gatherings (weddings, funerals, faith-based ceremonies, parties, political gatherings, etc.) not respecting physical distancing or other public health rules are putting everyone at risk. Consideration should be given to the right to freedom of assembly. These gatherings could be subject to restrictions in terms of number of participants, place (only in open spaces that are large enough) and measures that require physical distancing, mask-wearing, etc..
- 6.1.3     *Clarify and ensure* that the same restrictions to social, religious, or public gatherings are applied to all communities in the entire territory of the country, or to a particular district in a non-discriminatory manner, and ensure that they are not selectively enforced against only residents living in informal settlements or particular communities or groups. Local leaders must find a way to balance culture with public health and safety in the short term.
- 6.1.4     *Analyse and communicate* plans to limit viral spread by adjusting, when possible, community and cultural habits surrounding food sales, group meals, children and at-risk groups, including the elderly sleeping or living together with younger family members, public/shared restrooms, etc., especially if these are putting the public at unacceptable risk.
- 6.1.5     *Forecast and prepare* for opposition to social change recommendations. Overcome this opposition by proving that the benefits outweigh the costs.
- 6.1.6     *Avoid* social unrest and backlash for the lifestyle change recommendations, by improving awareness and engaging with the community directly, and making

common-sense decisions to ensure the safety of all. Under the threat of a long-term pandemic, culture and societal norms will adjust slowly, but encouragement may be needed to avoid potentially critical short-term harm to the community.

6.1.7 *Avoid* backlash against the Government where possible by closely engaging community leaders and having accurate, medical, science-based solutions that respect the dignity and values of informal residents and all minority groups.

6.1.8 *Overcome education, language and communications barriers* that may prevent an appropriate pandemic response due to language, culture, faith, race, gender, education, other minority-based prejudices or other communication barriers. Outreach and communication campaigns that take these potentially exacerbating influences into account will make the pandemic response more successful.

6.1.9 *Ensure* respect for public health measures by all residents, irrespective of whether they live in an informal settlement or not, as religious, social and cultural norms, habits and practices are sometimes not in line with guidelines for combating pandemics.

**Target**                    **GOLD and GREEN circles**

6.2 *Stigma, bias, prejudice, gender-based discrimination, and human rights abuses against residents of informal settlements are eradicated, and the protection of human rights is increased by Governments during any health crisis.*

**Actions**

6.2.1 *Identify and be mindful during pandemic response* of cultural stigma, bias, prejudice, gender-based discrimination, and human rights abuses against residents of informal settlements, that may increase or expand due to the pandemic.

6.2.2 *Ensure that response measures*, including law enforcement measures to ensure respect for public health regulations, are implemented in a non-discriminatory manner, and do not result in human rights violations in the broader community.

6.2.3 *Establish effective and responsive protection* measures for residents, living in informal settlements, that are subjected to threats, and ensure that such threats or potential criminal actions against them are investigated by the police and other law enforcement agencies.

6.2.4 *Ensure* fairness in access to health care, transportation, governmental support, food, and basic goods within informal settlements, even when broader community shortages impact everyone.

6.2.5 *Be vigilant* in protecting informal settlement children and youth from the potential for increased domestic abuse and increased illiteracy issues during homeschooling and stay-at-home orders.

6.2.6 *Reassure and protect* minority and vulnerable groups who may fear stigma, loss of employment or retaliation if they access public services, health care or even admit to contracting COVID-19. Fear of admitting illness may cause some minority groups to deny being ill, which would constrain efforts to stop the pandemic and place the informal residents and community at a greater and avoidable risk.

- 6.2.7 *Provide sufficient financial and other support* to ensure that residents that fall sick can afford to stop working, be tested and, if tested positive, quarantine without placing their families or work-related contacts at risk. Some informal settlement residents already have little or no economic flexibility. They need to be able to afford to stop working and quarantine without placing their families at risk.
- 6.2.8 *Consider providing no-questions-asked short-term quarantine housing and food* for residents who cannot safely quarantine at home; This would be to avoid bias and prejudice.

**Target**            **RED, GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 6.3 *Low-income residents and vulnerable groups are adequately supported*, in that food and staple goods are provided during peak pandemic periods and they have the support necessary to be able to comply with stay-at-home or quarantine protocols.

**Actions**

- 6.3.1 *Mobilize resources* at the appropriate public authority level, and be prepared to support low-income and vulnerable groups.
- 6.3.2 *Design work-from-home programmes*, whereby informal settlement residents can increase their ability to safely work from home. This may require some workflow redesign from employers, and support programmes to make home businesses more viable.
- 6.3.3 *Encourage employers* to keep workers, adjust their methods of doing business so that working from home is viable, and make available technologies to support this workplace shift.
- 6.3.4 *Create alternative employment* for residents that takes advantage of the skills of the informal settlement residents but can be performed safely from home or in a more isolated manner, enhancing social distancing and decreasing viral spread. These alternative employment paths can be short- or long-term, depending on their efficiency, profitability, and community demand.
- 6.3.5 *Offer enhanced job training, unemployment protection, and support for relocation* so that displaced workers can be temporarily supported, trained for new jobs, and have help with relocation costs so that they can travel to where better opportunities are located. These support services would decrease poverty and have long-term benefits as labour skills are enhanced to meet demand.
- 6.3.6 *Use stay-at-home orders* appropriately, for a sensible amount of time, based on appropriate medical science, when they are needed to break the pandemic viral spread cycle. These orders are more challenging for informal residents due to less economic flexibility, communication barriers, and a possible trust gap, among other reasons, and compliance levels are unlikely to be as high as in other sections of the city.
- 6.3.7 *Make pandemic testing easily available* to informal settlement residents so that the risks and magnitude of pandemic spread is well understood. This is especially

important in informal communities where other viral control methods are likely to be more difficult.

- 6.3.8 *Study and understand* the transportation, labour and working patterns of informal settlement residents so that policymakers understand the risks and begin to determine how to mitigate them, while supporting the informal settlement residents, where appropriate.
- 6.3.9 *Protect service workers*, who are often women, informal settlement residents, and minorities. They often work for low salaries in the service industry, have multiple jobs, provide cleaning and elderly care, have limited safe access to transportation, and work in places that put themselves and others at risk if they do not have appropriate personal protective equipment, testing services, and local authority support when necessary.

## Policy Area 7 - Food, basic consumption goods, and distribution

**Goal 7** *Ensure the adequate, safe manufacture and distribution of food, basic consumption goods, and medical supplies.*

### Rationale

An adequate amount of food, basic consumption goods and medical supplies need to be safely available to informal settlement residents during times of crisis. Access to food is a human right under art. 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>42</sup>. If these products are manufactured locally, the pandemic might impact their safe production. Alternatively, if they are sources from farther away or imported, shortages might occur at the worst possible times. Additionally, the manufacture of these goods can become more difficult due to pandemic-related safety issues, and new regulations may be needed. Worker shortages may limit some basic good production, and food processing, and hamper distribution efforts.

An important goal for informal (as well as formal) settlements should be to food and nutrition security. The four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization, and stability. Pandemic challenges make obtaining and retaining these goals more problematic.<sup>43, 44</sup> When these pillars are jeopardized, plans should be made to overcome the new obstacles to food and nutrition security.

Ideally, goods must be distributed safely to all informal settlement residents. A pandemic such as COVID-19, with its restrictions and lockdowns, creates shortages of all types of basic necessities but also surplus goods (e.g., food ordered but never needed, due to the shutting down of the hotel, restaurant and catering sector). Both incidents have an impact on prices, risks, producer compensation, and the efficiency/integrity of supply-chain logistics. Problems in the

<sup>42</sup> Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

<sup>43</sup> FAO Committee on World Food Security (2012). *Coming to terms with terminology. Food Security, Nutrition Security, Food Security and Nutrition, Food and Nutrition Security*. Thirty-ninth session (CFS 2012/39/4), Rome, Italy, 15-20 October 2012. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/MD776E/MD776E.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2020). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Rome, FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9692en>

supply and distribution of these basic goods can also become exacerbated or hijacked by black market participants. The distribution of necessary goods must be ensured and provided in a fair and just manner, especially to society's most vulnerable groups, and must be shielded from illegal black-market participants whenever possible.

The COVID-19 crisis requires the short-term stockpiling of necessary goods, and improved safety measures in food processing, farmers' markets, and basic goods manufacturing. In addition, making sure that the supply chains function adequately is of the highest priority throughout any crisis. The short-term response also requires fairness and justice in the distribution of these goods, and suffers when corruption disadvantages inhabitants.

Long-term resilience to pandemics in the production and distribution of food, medical supplies and basic goods must be based on the specific characteristics and patterns of the pandemic. The distribution of surplus food (drop-off centres, warehouses, and food banks) and surplus medical supplies should be tracked and organized. The public, the private sector, and civil society can cooperate, organizing collection, storage, and distribution functions.<sup>45</sup>

These challenges require greater options for social distancing in facility design. The distribution of necessary goods (foods, medicines, etc.) needs to be safe, with an emphasis on fairness and justice to offset black market activity and corruption. A good understanding of where residents are located is required, so they can be served adequately by all relevant stakeholders (aid agencies, food banks, NGOs, community programmes, etc.). Specifically, the size and location of the most vulnerable groups must be known so that the distribution processes can function appropriately, and adequate resources can be made available to meet the needs of the residents, and respect human rights

**Target**                    **RED and GOLD circles**

- 7.1                    *Adequate, safe access to food and basic goods with appropriate social distancing measures is provided* by those involved in the distribution of food, medical supplies, and basic goods

**Actions**

- 7.1.1                    *Analyse and map* the food supply chain and its main actors, the logistics of food supply networks, and the accessibility of the road network. This should also be done for the medical supply and basic goods distribution systems. These are key to the regular functions of informal settlements and the surrounding regions. This includes mapping the operational flows of both supply and demand; mapping the locations where farmers' market, cafes, restaurants, hotels, retail outlets, etc. exist. The goal is to identify supply and retail procedures, to identify pandemic spread threats in the distribution chain.
- 7.1.2                    *Identify* where the supply chain logistics systems regarding the distribution of food, medical supplies, and basic goods are unreasonably *inefficient* due to pandemic complications, and where they create health and safety risks regarding viral spread.

<sup>45</sup> Banerjee, A. V. and Duflo, E. (2019). *Good Economics for Hard Times*; and Banerjee, A. V. and Duflo, E. (2011). *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*.

- 7.1.3 *Enhance* the food, medical supply, and basic goods distribution systems by removing social, institutional and physical barriers, stockpiling certain key goods, and organizing fast collection of surplus food. This is to ensure the demand for goods is met even with a breakdown in some aspects of the labour and production sectors.
- 7.1.4 *Regulate appropriate social distancing* in the distribution of all necessary goods, to protect all residents, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.
- 7.1.5 *Consider expanding* “take away” cooked food and/or “home delivery” alternative procedures for vulnerable groups and the elderly, , as opposed to “sit-down soup kitchens “especially during lockdown periods.
- 7.1.6 *Study and respond* to children’s food and nutrient shortages that become exacerbated when school closures prevent school lunches from being provided.
- 7.1.7 *Ensure* that adequate supplies of staple and medical goods are safely distributed to all residents of informal settlements, even if normal patterns of distribution in these communities may be unsafe or compromised. Additionally, pandemic supply crisis may cause necessary products to be priced out of reach of informal settlement inhabitants, especially if unemployment increases. A public response, supplying necessary goods, using minimal and short-term price fixing, or other short-term government intervention, may need to be implemented if these issues become critical.

**Target**                    **RED, GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 7.2 *Adequate, safe access to food and basic goods with appropriate social distancing measures is provided* by those involved in the production of food and basic goods

**Actions**

- 7.2.1 *Analyse* the key aspects of the food and basic goods production systems essential to survival in informal settlements and key to the economic stability of their residents.
- 7.2.2 *Find out* where the food and basic goods manufacture and processing systems are difficult to perform while also applying appropriate social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures, so that these challenges can be overcome.
- 7.2.3 *Strengthen* the food (and water) and basic goods manufacture and processing systems by removing inefficiency barriers, ensuring the supply of raw materials, enhancing worker productivity, and using appropriate technologies to enhance the economic resilience of these sectors, indirectly building resilience to pandemics.
- 7.2.4 *Apply appropriate technology* to enhance productivity and hygiene standards, and increase or control social distancing within the production and manufacturing processes.
- 7.2.5 *Supply* expanded handwashing stations and appropriate personal protective equipment to the labour force as appropriate for their role in food, medical supply, and basic goods production and distribution.

- 7.2.6 *Understand* the limits to the adaptations possible within the food and basic goods manufacturing processes, so that critical problems in a pandemic situation are expected in advance.
- 7.2.7 *Prepare* an action plan for how to overcome these community-specific problems related to food production and manufacturing before they become critical.

**Target**            **RED, GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 7.3 *Minimal corruption, black market profiteering, and critical worker shortages*, all of which could hamper both the public and private response to a pandemic

**Actions**

- 7.3.1 *Study, and be quick to respond to, changes* in the current level of corruption, black market activity, transportation cartels, and existing worker skill and manpower shortages.
- 7.3.2 *Gather data and information* on corruption hotspots - and any other links with criminal activities profiting from the pandemic – in order to inform both short- and long-term anti-corruption strategies
- 7.3.3 *Fight* against corruption of all kinds within the public and private arena. Black marketing and corruption are quick to take advantage of pandemic crises, and the costs to the people are high if not curbed quickly and efficiently.
- 7.3.4 *Improve* justice and fairness in government and police responses to the challenges of informal settlements, and specifically ensure fairness for minorities, women, people of faith, and society's most vulnerable.
- 7.3.5 *Limit the scope* of black market and illegal activities and *prevent* widespread profiteering of necessary goods and medical supplies.

**Target**            **GOLD and GREEN circles**

- 7.4 *Local authorities and communities are prepared to deal with labour supply shortages in a pandemic*, and to support informal settlement residents

**Actions**

- 7.4.1 *Plan for emergency measures* where critical labour shortages put the health and safety of residents in danger. The COVID-19 response changes the labour supply and public demand for various goods, placing a strain on the already-struggling public and private sectors and the lives of the people. Examples of this may be found in the labour pool for trained medical staff, labour-intensive manufacturing, or those working in enclosed food-processing facilities.
- 7.4.2 *Enact emergency measures* for identified critical labour shortages. This may involve rapid training, 24-hour rotating shifts to lessen worker density, and other measures targeted at specific problems.
- 7.4.3 *Establish* support centres in the informal settlements to inform residents of COVID-19 measures, and support them in accessing aid, short-term housing or food, medical information, community aid groups, and employment opportunities (some newly created and organized).

## Policy Area 8 - Environmental concerns, green spaces, recreation and social events

**Goal 8** *Provide for safer enjoyment of the environment, green spaces, and recreational and social activities.*

### Rationale

Green spaces, sport, music, travel, tourism, and recreational social activities of all kinds are central to physical and mental well-being, and a healthy culture and society. However, these activities often violate safe pandemic social distancing, and can become super-spreader events if they bring large groups of people together unsafely. A pandemic can spread widely when residents return to their homes after unsafe activities. It is incumbent on local authority and community leaders to provide avenues for the residents of their communities to safely enjoy green spaces and the many recreational and social activities central to society and quality of life.

Air pollution has also aggravated the course of the current pandemic. European Environmental Agency studies found that the most vulnerable groups are more likely to be exposed to air pollution, and COVID-19 respiratory symptoms are more severe in those circumstances<sup>46</sup> Informal settlement residents can also be at greater risk of undue exposure to hazardous chemicals through weak waste management and unsafe water sources.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis requires appropriate short-term responses to limit viral spread during the enjoyment of recreational and social activities. Social activities, such as weddings, funerals, and faith-based events, that, according to local customs, “demand” the assembly of many people are especially challenging on a cultural level. Tact, proper messaging, and community-leader support are needed for any reasonable level of compliance with safety measures for this type of gathering. Long-term resilience to pandemics in recreational and social gatherings must be based on the specific characteristics, patterns of viral spread and lethality. In the case of COVID-19, an emphasis on improved social distancing, handwashing, and personal protective equipment is key. In order to protect their people (and, by extension, the economy that fuels society and produces tax revenue), governments should prioritize safe, outdoor recreation, and strict limits on indoor and mass gatherings for sporting, music, and dense social gatherings of all types.

**Target**            **RED and GOLD circles**

8.1 *Outdoor recreation, sporting and music events, and social gatherings are available and safe for everyone.*

### Actions

8.1.1 *Identify and analyse what recreational and other public gatherings pose the greatest risk of viral spread, and determine which require banning or adjustment*

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<sup>46</sup> European Environment Agency (EEA) (2020) *COVID-19 and Europe’s environment: impacts of a global pandemic*. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/post-corona-planet/covid-19-and-europes-environment>



for safe enjoyment, and what green spaces or recreational activities could be safely expanded.

- 8.1.2 *Limit public sporting and music venues* that unsafely gather crowds, adjust them to much more limited density and size, and *consider* online or televised sporting and music activities
- 8.1.3 *Adjust or ban* outdoor recreational and social gatherings that cannot be safely enjoyed in their typical form. Local community-leader support is key for this.
- 8.1.4 *Provide, or make affordably available,* handwashing stations, cash-transfer stations (and expand digital-payment methods), food/drink vending machines, , and adequate personal protective equipment suitable for the recreational and social gatherings commonly enjoyed in the local community.
- 8.1.5 *Expand and map* green spaces that can be enjoyed safely and which also enhance quality of life and environmental sustainability within informal settlements. Promote participatory mapping<sup>47</sup> and effective public participation, to ensure that there are paths to safely access natural areas, playgrounds and parks, while also keeping safe social distance. Adopt appropriate waste management plans, and keep the public informed of the safe and sustainable use of water leisure areas and green spaces.

**Target**                    **GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles**

- 8.2 *Recreational travel, hospitality and tourism* services are provided to visitors and residents in a manner that puts no one at undue risk

**Actions**

- 8.2.1 *Locate, map and track* the density of tourism-related activities, such as hotels, motels, rooms to let, cultural sights, transportation nodes, and attractions, to determine if visitors or residents are put at increased risk of viral spread in their current design.
- 8.2.2 *Determine and regulate* whether full or partial closures of attractions or tourism-related activities is required to ensure public safety. If so, then *determine how long and in what form* these closures should be imposed.
- 8.2.3 *Provide* ways to encourage (communication and local engagement) or punish (fines or other penalties) businesses who violate safety measures and place people at undue risk.
- 8.2.4 *Develop* a policy (including processes and responsibilities) that ensures safe transport for recreational and social travel (taxis, mass transit, airport-to-hotel shuttles; cleaning and ventilation guidelines), and encourages safer and healthier modes of transport (walking, cycling, etc.).
- 8.2.5 *Redesign* travel- and tourism-related activities, to minimize the potential for public harm, which will also limit necessary closures and minimize economic harm. This redesigned plan should be very detailed if it is a core component to

<sup>47</sup> “Participatory mapping” means the use of a growing toolbox of techniques that can help members of the public record and share spatial knowledge through the use of participatory methods and cartographic representations, often in digital form.

the economic and social functioning of the community. Tourism-dependent areas suffer greatly and early in a pandemic, and operations need to be designed to balance safety while continuing to adequately service visitors.

- 8.2.6 *Mandate* when and where recreational travel should or should not be allowed, so that pandemic danger to the resident workforce and visitors alike is minimized.

## **Policy Area 9 - Buildings, construction and land planning**

### ***Goal 9. Viral-spread risks posed by commercial buildings, public buildings, educational facilities, informal homes, and other constructions are controlled***

#### **Rationale**

The built environment within informal settlements is usually unplanned, with a wide variety of physical and legal nonconformity. Commercial, public, and educational facilities pose significant risk as focal points for viral spread. Larger facilities, such as hospitals, schools, community centres, government buildings, transport hubs, and retail and grocery stores pose greater risks due to heavy, human, indoor traffic, difficulty imposing safe social-distancing procedures, and limited ventilation. Additionally, informal residential housing tends to be more densely spaced and populated, making quarantining and social distancing more difficult.

Governmental officials should use appropriate planning to limit viral spread at hotspots. They need to understand the normal movement patterns of people within specific informal settlements, and adjust these patterns to limit high-density travel in locations that could become high viral-spread junctions.

The structure and layout of the communities create many risks and inefficiencies that impedes long-term economic success, health, safety, and security of their residents. Limited planning could also create an environment more conducive to viral spread within the broader community. The COVID-19 pandemic requires appropriate short-term responses to its very high transmission potential, related to risks posed by how the built environment is used. Additionally, creating long-term resilience to pandemics needs to be a priority for both formal and informal development, so that appropriate steps can be rapidly taken to avoid potentially catastrophic outcomes.

#### **Target**                    **RED and GOLD circles**

- 9.1 *Large and intensely utilized commercial, educational, and public facilities are safe (hospitals, medical centres, government buildings, schools, transport hubs, shopping centres, etc.) and are operated safely*

COVID-19 has shown that, when a crisis occurs, societal safety and human security is about both the safety of the infrastructure and the built environment and the continuous provision of public goods and access to core services for the most vulnerable members of the community. Poor access to services in underprivileged neighbourhoods makes compliance with lockdown orders impossible in those locations, and transfers the exposure risks to other neighbourhoods.

## Actions

9.1.1 *Identify, map, and analyse* which facilities pose the greatest risk of viral spread, and determine which require full or partial closure, when, and for how long. This should be studied in correlation with the mapping and identification of vulnerable groups and their geographic distribution, so that responses are appropriate to risks. Electronic service provision should be used wherever possible.

9.1.2 *Identify* which buildings are frequently used and therefore have long queues. Standardize procedures, redesign queues, and initiate lists for providing services by appointment or electronically.

9.1.3 *Carefully plan* for fully or partially closed schools. *Determine the appropriateness* of distance learning (phone-, computer-, or television-based), and multiple shifts for classroom work at public schools, and *consider* homeschooling or neighbourhood, small-group learning.

9.1.4 *Modify the use of large, intensely utilized buildings* in ways that decrease the risk of viral spread (hands-free opening of doors/windows, increased ventilation, wider corridors, redesigned queue systems, increased seat spacing, limited number of people inside, etc.).

9.1.5 *Ensure appropriate public response* to the strain of school closures, as more children are at home, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, and women. Schools should close last and open first for several reasons, if possible. This places them at risk in the school setting (which should be managed) but limits the risks they pose when out of school, and limits the negative economic effect of having a parent stay with them.

**Target** GOLD, GREEN and BLUE circles

9.2 *Sustainable adequate housing* is available for all classes of informal settlement residents

For people to be able to follow crisis-response mechanisms and adopt difficult measures such as quarantines and lockdowns during a pandemic, the improvement of access to public spaces should be in correlation with an adequate housing stock.

## Actions

9.2.1 *Understand* the increased risks of viral spread due to the specific physical characteristics of informal housing in the local settlements<sup>48</sup>.

9.2.2 *Determine* which temporary or long-term improvements and adjustments to the housing stock or social housing would help prevent or mitigate viral transfer and

<sup>48</sup> WHO *Housing and Health Guidelines* is a toolkit to be used by stakeholders and rightholders. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>

ensure healthy housing conditions as set out in the WHO Housing and Health Guidelines.

- 9.2.3 *Identify, map and provide* temporary housing, or quarantine facilities (e.g. hotels that are currently empty, and repurposed community assets, like schools and community centres that are currently closed) to help prevent the spread among family members, at-risk vulnerable groups, and the local community if the small size or density of the informal homes is a significant risk factor.
- 9.2.4 *Expand and invest* in social housing options both as short-term solutions for homelessness problems and as a longer-term action to provide greater access to affordable housing. They should be designed to limit the amount of indoor public spaces in these facilities where social distancing is impossible.
- 9.2.5 *Allow* for home access via external doors, and more staircases to limit indoor concentrations of residents and provide excellent ventilation along exterior public walkways (if the climate and density of the project permits). Elevators and indoor or centralized staircases create high-traffic bottlenecks. Decentralizing access to apartments by using exterior walkways and more staircases could greatly decrease the concentrations of people, limiting viral-spread risk.
- 9.2.6 *Make simple adjustments* to how the buildings are used, to lower risks for vulnerable residents and provide easier access for emergency services. If informal housing includes a high percentage of elderly or vulnerable residents, consideration should be given to offering alternative housing to households with older persons. Relocation may be appropriate and feasible, respecting the person's right to live in an environment that is safe and adaptable to their personal preferences and changing capacities, and allow them to be able to reside at their own home for as long as possible.<sup>49</sup>

**Target**            **RED, GOLD and GREEN circles**

9.3 *Roads, footpaths and bottlenecks* have lower peak traffic

Lower traffic needs to implement the principals of “urban mixity”, where retail and business are integrated in residential areas. Urban mixity is an important strategy for reducing the demand for interurban and intraurban mobility, hence reducing the risk of cluster spreads in the occurrence of pandemics. It is, therefore, important that informal housing settlements be upgraded with careful integration of retail and business. As well as reduction of risk exposure, such spatial planning strategies<sup>50</sup> bring other benefits, such as the reduction of pollutant emissions, enhancing cities' climate policies.

## Actions

- 9.3.1 *Study movement patterns* within informal settlements to identify where high-density areas create public risk. Road closures, differing methods of mobility and the addition of new access points should be considered to mitigate these risks.

<sup>49</sup> *United Nations Principles for Older Persons*, GA resolution 46/91, 16 December 1991.

<sup>50</sup> For details, FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

- 9.3.2 *Prepare mapped plans* for quarantines and lockdowns in informal settlements, understanding that they will be more difficult to implement and monitor, more costly for residents, and harder to enforce than in formal communities. Access points, emergency-service routes, high-risk areas, and actual and proposed traffic flows should be incorporated into the plans/maps to limit exposure risk at hotspots.
- 9.3.3 *Balance the risk* of a pandemic with the existing dangers facing the community. Informal communities are often at greater risk from a variety of other threats, such as fires, floods, poor air quality, and chronic health issues. *Disaster response infrastructure should be enhanced* and appropriate for each of these community-specific challenges, notably through the identification of vulnerabilities and exposure to risk as part of the greater integrated risk management strategy. A holistic strategy to protect residents is needed in these already at-risk communities.

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## V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss some final considerations revealed throughout this Recovery Action Plan. These considerations suggest broad courses of action, and some thoughts on implementation that may vary based on local context.

### Informal settlements are more vulnerable to pandemics

Informal settlements in the UNECE region tend to increase the risk of pandemic spread by their very nature. The people living in these communities commonly endure inadequate living conditions, live with high population density, and have a widely dispersed service-oriented employment base (often residents have two or three jobs). They generally tend to rely on inadequate service provision (including energy, water and sanitation) and have more limited health care, and less access to education. There is a general lack of good demographic and spatial data, heavy concentrations of minorities and vulnerable groups, and generally low incomes coupled with limited resources. There is commonly a history of government mistrust from residents of informal settlements, and social bias, and public prejudice against persons living in them. All these factors increase the risk of pandemic spread within these settlements and, by extension, the surrounding formal communities. There is the potential for a more sustained outbreak due to more difficult and less certain containment options.

### Authorities must act to make informal settlements more resilient

The potential for suffering created by a pandemic is greater in almost every way within informal communities. The historical inability, misunderstanding or reluctance to solve the root causes of informality has created the current situation. The relevant actors should find a way to supply adequate housing to meet the changing needs of the population; gather and retain necessary information; allow for the formalization of existing informality (along with effective registry and cadaster enhancement); provide appropriate levels of services; and ensure tenure security, justice, equity, the fulfilment of the human rights, and effective governance. These refinements will limit the creation of new informal communities, and prevent the expansion of some persistent social, economic, environmental and health/safety shortcomings.

### The Recovery Action Plan is designed to support initiatives to meet pandemic challenges

This COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region is designed to highlight appropriate goals, targets, and actions to minimize or prevent harm resulting from a pandemic and respond to the challenges of COVID-19, in particular. It is designed to build resilience in both the built environment and the social structures of informal settlements. It is also designed to assist in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, as well as the call by Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, to build back better from the pandemic, and promote human rights, justice, equity, and transparency. It is envisioned to assist in harmonizing formal and informal communities within their cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic settings, which allows for easier achievement of all SDGs.

The Recovery Action Plan aims to address the key aspects of the challenges related to fighting a pandemic. However, the structure, depth and focus of this document has left some important details undiscussed. We will touch on some of these below.

### **The guidelines on the formalization of informal constructions to support concrete positive action**

Formalizing informal settlements is a key component when striving to create a more resilient and sustainable city, and flexibility in its resistance to future pandemics. The guidelines provide an effective tool to start the formalization process in a structured way, and should be adjusted as appropriate to meet local political, environmental, legal, physical, and economic realities.

### **Epilogue**

Implementation of the Recovery Action Plan in a local context should vary greatly from country to country, region to region, and informal settlement to informal settlement. It should also vary based on the changing nature of the pandemic threat, shifting political/social will, alterations in the available resources, and other changes in the nature of the challenges facing residents and local authorities alike. For this reason, the specifics of implementation of the various goals, targets, and actions were not discussed in detail. The timing of when and how they should be applied was described, assuming that they can be implemented in a flexible manner as appropriate. Priority levels should be determined based on cost/benefit studies, and be inclusive of local authorities, local resident groups, faith-based groups, national/city governments and NGO stakeholders, as appropriate. Without ensuring the active participation of those targeted by policy measures, top-down implementation plans are often less efficient and less effective. As such, we have left most of these local implementational aspects for greater discussion and consideration by the parties involved.

Implementation of the Recovery Action Plan for informal settlements needs adequate funding and investment. This aspect should be elaborated in the Plan. A clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism, with two to three key performance indicators per strategic area, make it easier to raise funds for implementation. The socioeconomic benefit analyses, mentioned in the study, could provide guidance on where the priorities lie, in the case of limited funding.

This Recovery Action Plan is meant to show where appropriate interventions can simultaneously have health/safety and socioeconomic benefits. It shows where pandemic resilience, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs can be achieved, benefiting everyone over time. The goals, targets and actions described herein, coupled with careful analysis of the specific local challenges and resources, will result in more effective and appropriate interventions. Greater integration and formalization of informal communities within the greater national landscape will potentially provide innumerable benefits for all.

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