

# **Kickstarting the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region CIS, Ukraine and Georgia subregional online training workshop**

**Date:** 12 November 2021

**Time:** 9:30-12:00 CET online

## **WORKSHOP REPORT**

### **1. Introduction**

In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, UNECE has prepared the [COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the ECE Region](#) (henceforth - RAP) which was endorsed at the 82nd Session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management on 8 October 2021. This Recovery Action Plan is underpinned by assessment reports on informal settlements in one project city: Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan as well as in other three project cities namely: Tirana, Albania; Podgorica, Montenegro; and Skopje, North Macedonia.

### **2. Objectives**

The **CIS, Ukraine and Georgia subregional online training workshop** was designed to get an understanding of the situation in the specific locations in the subregion and to:

- Raise awareness about the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region and its key deliverables;
- Discuss with representatives of local and national authorities and local stakeholders how to best implement the Plan's recommendations within their specific contexts.
- Present the online learning platform for the Recovery Action Plan with resources and trainings on the Plan's implementation amongst other resources.

### **3. Preparatory phase (e.g., identification of presentation themes, speakers and agenda, invitation letters, etc.)**

The workshops agenda was designed in such a way to allow the authors of the RAP to present in detail the document, thus allowing the participants to get a general understanding and as well as to provide key tools for its implementation in the current circumstances of CIS countries. The workshop included representatives of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to present their

local experiences, and to discuss how the RAP can be adjusted to improve the current situations in informal settlements.

The stakeholders in this project and invited to the workshop included the relevant ministries, local governments, NGOs, etc.

The preparatory phase included the development of the list of relevant stakeholders who were to be invited, identification of speakers, creation of the official invitation letter which was to be sent alongside the [questionnaire](#) which was to be completed in advance of the workshop. The official invitation and questionnaire were sent on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2021. The questionnaire was discussed among the project experts and finally modified to assess the participants' initial understanding about the topics as well as their expectations from the workshop. Several reminders were sent to the participants on completing the questionnaire and registering for the workshop to make sure of their participation and engagement.

The workshop was available in English, Russian and Armenian.

#### ***4. Implementation of the workshop***

**Alexandre Hedjazi**, Director, Global Environmental Policy Program, University of Geneva and **Matteo Tarantino**, Lecturer and Senior Research Associate, Institute for Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva served as moderators for the workshop.

The workshop was attended by 30 participants. The opening statement and welcome remarks were delivered by **Gulnara Roll**, Secretary, Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, UNECE, giving a general overview of the project. She highlighted the importance of discussing the RAP in the post COVID period. Many years informal settlements issues have been in the focus for the Committee, including the development of many publications. It is a regional and global problem. Ms. Roll focused also on the cooperation with the city of Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan where informal settlements is at the centre of the discussion.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Roll mentioned that the RAP is an outcome of collective efforts. It will give a unique opportunity for learning the methodology and comprehensive approach for recovery. In addition, the presence of the RAP's authors was very useful. UNECE is open for cooperation on how to implement the RAP methodology. The RAP adopted by the Committee is available on UNECE's website (in both English and Russian). She concluded her speech by informing that a new Geneva UN Charter Centre of Excellence would be established in Yerevan, thus strengthening the presence of UNECE and the cooperation with the city.

**Steven Nystrom**, NewStream Companies, former FIG Commission 9 Chair, presented the RAP, particularly the general structure, nine broad policy areas. He mentioned that each policy area has primary and secondary goals. Under the latter there are specific actions. There are six policy briefs, which help to achieve the SDGs. City assessment reports are important for understanding the individual problems. Based on those documents the City Recovery Action Plan is developed. He also mentioned that a lecture series had been developed for formalization of illegal constructions. Now, it is planned to develop a similar series of lectures on the RAP. Timing in the RAP is essential. Cost-benefit analysis is key for making decisions. Along with the cost benefit analysis, Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental,

and Legal (PESTEL) and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis are used as well. During RAP planning and implementation, one should take into account the fact of having limited resources. He also stressed the importance of cross-cutting themes of implementation.

**Chryssy Potsiou**, Professor of Cadastre and Land Management, National Technical University of Athens, Honorary FIG President, former Vice-Chair of WPLA, in the beginning of her speech mentioned that three publications had been developed by UNECE regarding these topics, particularly the “Self-made cities”, “[Formalizing the Informal](#)” and “Guidelines on the formalization of informal constructions”. She presented the connection between RAP and land registration and cadastre, as well as possibilities of using those tools in the recovery: Integrate land registration and cadastre with formalization and the RAP. She also mentioned the importance of developing tools for increasing the urban density. It is required to prepare a Pandemic Risk Reduction Plan (short, mid- and long-term resilience against pandemic). In addition to the above-mentioned, she advised not to try to solve everything at once.

**Rik Wouters**, Director, Eureg Advice, former Vice-Chair of WPLA, presented land registry and cadastre related issues on how to integrate land administration with formalization and the RAP. He also presented important terminology and advised to collect data, if it is really needed as it is costly in some cases and reuse existing data is the best way. Crowdsourcing for data gathering and cheap solutions for data collecting are important. It is advised to improve legal and institutional frameworks for land administration. RAP can accelerate the improvement of land and cadastre registers; cost effective way of data collection, crowd sourcing for data collection.

After presentations made by international experts, local representatives presented their experiences in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia.

The case of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan was presented by **Aygul Kochorbaeva**, Mayor's Office of Bishkek. She presented in place of Bolot Apilov, Director, Mayor's Office of Bishkek, Public-State Administration of Capital-Construction.

She presented solutions to the problems of informal settlements in the city of Bishkek.. Public-private Department of Capital Construction is a structural unit of the municipality, which carries out infrastructure development for residential districts of Bishkek. Starting from 1989 during the unstable situation an influx of developers emerged, which were allocated land plots for construction of individual residential houses. In many cases land of land plots occurred. As of today, there are 47 residential districts with 218,000 population in the outskirts of the city. One of the reasons for internal migration was the fact that the city provides many opportunities for employment, education and health care. Currently there are many problems related to the provision of communal services, roads as well as an access to educational and health care institutions. In most cases construction of individual residential houses is carried out without design documents approved by municipal authorities. The most part of the districts' roads are constructed without asphalt.

Based on the population growth and the current situation the municipality developed a concept for modernization of five informal districts and development of productive-logistics

centers in two informal districts. The program is being realized in the frames of UNECE projects and currently negotiations are carried out between the municipality, UNECE and CDIA for submission of a grant application for technical assistance. Meanwhile, the municipality worked with UNECE to assess the impact of COVID on the city economy.

The experience of Armenia was presented by **Tanya Arzumanyan**, Head of Housing Stock Management and Communal Infrastructure. In Armenia informal residential units and districts containing those units have been formed after the 7.12.1988 Spitak Earthquake as temporary solution of housing problems of households remaining without shelter due to the ERQ. Housing stock with 8.9 million m<sup>2</sup> have been destroyed along with numerous objects of different significance.

Though there have been tremendous works accomplished by the state budget, different state, donor, international and other organizations there are more than 7,000 temporary structures (sometimes called *domics*) in the settlements of the earthquake zone. The temporary structures have been made of wood, metal sheets and were designed for 30-year lifespan. As of today, they are in a deteriorated condition. In some cases, the residents have surrounded them with stone walls.

The temporary structures are mainly concentrated in two regions: Shirak and Lori. And there are some – in Aragatsotn Region. 78% of the temporary structures are distributed in Gyumri (2800), Spitak (1300) and Vanadzor (650). In urban settlements the majority of these temporary structures are in state or community lands whereas in rural settlements they are located in state/community lands (62%) and in citizens' lands (38%). According to Armenia's Prime-Minister's decree registration of these temporary structures was implemented in 2019. During that period maps as well as tables were prepared on temporary structures. The collected information contains data on temporary structures as well as families living in them.

It is worth mentioning that problems emerged in districts where these temporary structures exist are identical to those problems existing in the region. Particularly, the "temporary structures" have a small area (20-30m<sup>2</sup>). Socially vulnerable people and special group classified families (most of them are handicapped people) live in the most part of these districts. The temporary structures are congested and as a result during the pandemic maintenance of the social distance is not possible. The level of provision of communal services and accessibility of infrastructures and sanitary conditions are not adequate. For example, a lack of water does not allow people to take the necessary preventive measures.

The Government has adopted a programme to continue the resettlement of families from the temporary structures as well as to demolish the temporary structures and restore the urban planning environment of those areas. Different options for housing provision of the families living in these temporary structures is being discussed.

## **5. Conclusions**

The following the key issues which emerged during the workshop:

1. The participants are reminded that this is an ongoing project, with many parts, going out for many years now; the online platform will be populated with the teaching and learning materials to deepen the knowledge on the recovery of informal settlements from the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The local experiences and what has been shared-during the workshop, is the need to build kind of formal-shared knowledge reference center, which is one of the requirements of this project; this center shall be used to understand what about the situation is in various places-to build shared-knowledge reference point and take stock of local experiences, which is one of the main objectives of this project.
3. How to lower the cost of acquiring data, without compromising the data itself; that high-quality data can be very expensive, and this is a topic to be furtherly explored. Lastly what, methods of getting the specific data with the best possible price for value ratio.
4. There seems to be overall need to explore ways to streamline the legal and the business frameworks; changing the legal framework takes long time, so how this fits with the emergency response perspective of the RAP needs to be further explored among all stakeholders.

All workshop materials, including presentations, are available at the dedicated [webpage](#).

1. Workshop agenda
2. Questionnaire (sample)
3. Presentations