

**Kickstarting the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements  
in the UNECE Region  
Western Balkans subregional online training workshop**

**Date: 10 November 2021**

**Time: 14:30 – 17:00 CET**

**Platform: Zoom**

**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 UNECE Region*. This Recovery Action Plan aims at providing cities with robust and efficient action measures to enhance the integration of informal settlements in the urban fabric while recovering from the crisis caused by the pandemic. The Plan is underpinned by assessment reports on informal settlements in the four project cities: Tirana, Albania; Podgorica, Montenegro; and Skopje, North Macedonia as well as Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

2. Objectives

The **Implementation of the [COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region](#) online training workshop** were focused on the implementation of the Plan in the Western Balkans as well as other countries in the subregion. The event was designed 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., invitation letters, identification of presentation themes/speakers, etc.)

After the preparation phase, within which the Lists of Participants were made, speakers and topics of discussions identified, the Invitation Letter along with the [questionnaire](#) to be completed in advance of the workshop were sent on 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2021.

4. Conducted workshop

In total, the workshop was attended by 46 participants. Opening statement and welcoming speech was delivered by **Gulnara Roll**, Secretary, Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, UNECE, giving a general overview of the project.

**Steven Nystrom**, NewStream Companies, former FIG Commission 9 Chair, guided the participants through the different policy areas that need implementation, and his presentation was about to show case, explaining how everything is connected - *RAP Strategy, Framework, & 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, presented the connection between RAP and land registration and cadastre, and possibilities of using those tools in the recovery: *Integrate land registration and cadastre with formalization & the RAP*

**Rik Wouters**, Director, Eureg Advice, former Vice-Chair of WPLA, guided the participants through the Questions from Survey, Land Administration importance and how to build it, inviting participants to actively intervene and to comment. Besides the local and/or national government representatives, other stakeholders (relevant CSOs, NGOs etc.,) were invited to discuss with the experts and government representatives from their perspective.

The speakers were representing national power grid operators, local and/or national government representatives.

**Frida Pashako**, Director of Territorial Development Control at the Municipality of Tirana, have presented *"Perspectives on informal settlements in the city of Tirana"*.

**Miljan Barovic** - Head of Secretariat for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development - Municipality of Podgorica, shared with the participants the *"Key findings from the city of Podgorica assessment report and using the Recovery Action Plan"*.

**Darko Vucetic**, Head of Center of Geospatial Information Management, Republic Geodetic Authority, Republic of Serbia, shared with the participants *"Reflections on the implementation of the COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan in the Republic of Serbia"*

The speakers, coming from different partnering countries and cities, pointed out the major achievement so far in RAP implementation, challenges of the formalization process, policies making, minding the social dimension of the vulnerable groups as well.

The presentations were followed by a discussion among participants and speakers, which was moderated by **Matteo Tarantino**, Lecturer and Senior Research Associate, Institute for Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva, and **Alexandre Hedjazi**, Director, Global Environmental Policy Program, University of Geneva.

**North Macedonia:** Mr. Jovanoski expressed that they have a huge experience in "formalizing the informal", but stressing out that in Balkans in general, this is kind of "never-ending story", in terms of how to fix the existing situation and to cope with the collaterals of informal building in the past. This is the reason why the governments always trying to "stretch" the periods of implementation of these processes, trying to buy some additional time to implement solutions in areas already damaged by informal building.

**Albania, Tirana:** Representative from the Municipality of Tirana, stressed out that the most affected by illegal building is the area that got hit by the earthquake, so that furtherly means that expropriation of these buildings needs to be substitute with the alternative housing/living space, according to the local and international standards. This is comprised also within the Law on construction and Recovery plan from earthquake, but so far with the very poor implementation.

## 5. Conclusions

Concluding remarks were made by **Matteo Tarantino**, Lecturer and Senior Research Associate, Institute for Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva.

Three of the Key outcomes emerged during the workshop:

The participants were reminded that this is an ongoing project, with many parts, 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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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](#).

- Workshop agenda
- Questionnaire (sample)
- Presentations