

Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements

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SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the most vulnerable people the hardest. This includes those living in informal settlements in the ECE region, especially women, old people, young people and migrants. Informal settlements are densely populated, with inadequate household water and sanitation, little or no waste management, overcrowded public transport and limited access to formal health care facilities. They suffer from inadequate housing, the lack of basic services and security of tenure. Urgent action is needed to enable residents to stay safe and healthy and thus increase resilience to future pandemics and natural disasters.

Informal settlements are particularly vulnerable to the impact of disease outbreaks, as disease monitoring and containment can be particularly challenging due to the lack of adequate data that could be used to inform appropriate policy response. Such data would include the number of inhabitants per household, details on the access to adequate healthcare facilities and basic services, means of employment and stability of work which could indicate the ability to enforce a quarantine. The UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 states that “The crisis will exacerbate inequalities especially in vulnerable settings and fragile locations”. Also availability of geographical data regarding ownership situation, house stock, land parcels, road infrastructure is a key issue.

The post COVID-19 recovery plans will address the issue of informal settlements as the priority. Such plans should include, firstly, the legalization of informal buildings. Integrating informal constructions into formal land markets provides clear ownership and security of tenure, and through this, economic security to residents as it gives them the access to credits and mortgages. In turn, security of tenure encourages residents to invest in their homes. Formalization is therefore a tool to increase security of tenure and ownership rights but also to protect and promote human rights.

Attention to the improvements of land cadasters is one of the key targets.

Furthermore, such newly formalized settlements should be upgraded and connected with basic services and infrastructure to ensure residents have access to adequate sanitation and facilities that would safeguard them against future pandemics. They should then be made livable – energy efficient, healthy, with livable and well-planned urban spaces, accessible services and good transport links.

Addressing challenges of the informal settlements requires an integrated approach, focusing on the issues of housing, urban infrastructure, green public spaces and social services. The gender dimension will be an important cross-cutting issue in the proposed project.

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