

## Some informations concerning the informal settlements in Southe-Eastern European Countires

### Sources:

- *SELF-MADE CITIES In search of sustainable solutions for informal settlements in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region* <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/SelfMadeCities.pdf>
- *Informal Urban Development in Europe experiences from Albania and Greece*, UNECE, 2010
- *The mapping and enumeration of informal Roma settlements in Serbia*, by Zlata Vuksanovic-Macura, 2012

Review of different manifestations of informal settlements in the UNECE region indicates a number of contributing factors: rapid urbanization, displacement of vulnerable people, dysfunctional land management and planning systems, and persistent shortage of affordable housing. The ways different countries come to terms with the existing illegal and informal development as well as the ways they find to prevent such development in the future differ, as they depend upon history, politics, economics and social development (and the type of informal settlements). Increasing decentralization and changes in governance in many countries will also impact these choices, since solutions will require action at all levels of government, leadership from municipal administrations and the mobilization of residents of informal settlements.

In general, despite a great range of spatial manifestations across the UNECE region, there are several major types of informal settlements:

- a. Squatter settlements on public or private land;
- b. Settlements for refugees and vulnerable people;
- c. Upgraded squatter settlements;
- d. Illegal suburban land subdivisions on legally owned private, with illegal changing of land-use regulations, often on the urban fringe;
- e. Overcrowded, dilapidated housing without adequate facilities in city centers or densely urbanized areas.

The type and extent of informal settlement formation vary from country to country and from city to city within the same country, according to local conditions and existing planning and land management frameworks. Many countries in the region (e.g. Greece, Italy and Spain) have attempted to address the challenges of informal settlements in the last 20 (or even 30 or 60) years through:

- (a) privatizing land to refugees and providing housing to the poor (after the Second World War);
- (b) more effective control and regularization of territorial development;
- (c) decentralized planning and land management;
- (d) more systematic education at all levels (e.g. university graduate engineers, lawyers, registers, judges, technical practitioners, local authorities, the public and the media) in land tenure aspects;

(e) addressing construction and civil engineering issues;  
(f) professional training in building inspection; and (g) planning and neighborhood upgrading. Significant attention was paid to increasing public awareness of environmental issues, of the benefits of following the technical specifications and regulations in construction, and of the risks of being informal. Significant research has been pursued in the academia and the public and private sectors on these issues. (p.61)

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In Albania informal settlements contain up to a quarter of the population in major cities and account for 40 per cent of the built-up area. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, they are home to 11 per cent of the population in the 14 largest cities. In Belgrade, informal settlements take up to 40 per cent of the residential areas. In Kyrgyzstan, 150,000 to 200,000 people have migrated to Bishkek from the provinces in the past five years. (p.19)

Informal settlements in Tirana. The estimated population of the Tirana region grew from 374,000 in 1990 to 618,000 in 1999. Close to 55 per cent of the population lives in informal settlements. Incoming villagers occupy a plot of land and start building a house, adding floors and finishing construction over time. As a result, Bathore, an attractive hillside on the outskirts of Tirana, is a new neighbourhood of illegal three-storey houses with no roads, sewerage or electricity. Those who first occupy the land then illegally sell parts to newcomers. Illegal construction usually means no access to schools or health care. (UNECE 2002, Country Profiles on Housing: Albania. Geneva: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe).

ALUIZNI is the responsible national Agency for Legalization and Urbanization of Illegal Constructions and Settlements. Its work is to put together proposals for approving the legalization of illegal settlements in Tirana. ALUIZNI has prepared a pilot legalization process of an area of 55 ha. The area is being processed for a complete digitalized documentation containing not less than 30 characters for each property to be registered. The first legalization permits were granted during February 2007.

The registration of properties will follow the process, after duties are paid equal to \$1/m<sup>2</sup>. In total, there are 681 informal zones; in 152 (equal to 23,000 ha of land), technical and legal documentation are ready, while for 281 the process is under way. There are also some 98 zones or 168 ha that are occupied by group buildings (not classified as illegal settlements). ALUIZNI has logged a total of some 350,000 requests for legalization, of which some 80,000 were for multi-dwelling apartments and shops. Source: Aldoni 2007

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Challenges in legalizing and upgrading of informal settlements in Greece.

Illegal construction in Greece, resulting in informal settlements, dates back to the 1950s. The reasons are complicated and have changed through the years. Informal settlements now occur in industrial zones, urban fringe areas and in rural areas, including attractive vacation areas. Several attempts have been made to minimize the problem either by applying procedures aiming at informal settlements' integration into a city plan with a simultaneous provision of urban planning improvements (e.g. the Laws of 1977 and 1983), in parallel with tough penalties (e.g. the Law of 2003), or locally through extensions of the existing urban plans, in some cases resettlement. Nevertheless, none of the applied procedures have proven adequate to stop the creation of new informal construction. Some projects have been successful, but most have

proven to be costly and time-consuming due to the lack of modern, national tools (e.g. a national cadastre and other necessary spatial information infrastructure) and poor coordination between the various land-related agencies involved in development and permitting procedures.

The real size of the problem is difficult to estimate due to a lack of information. In fact, all projects for new urban land refer to areas with existing unplanned developments. As mentioned above, these include both legal and illegal construction, since construction in areas without a detailed city plan is permitted in Greece.

Many regularization and upgrading projects have been carried out in Greece since 1982, as “urban regeneration projects”. Recent estimates by the Hellenic Chamber of Commerce show that informal settlements in Greece contain as many as 1,000,000 residences (or 15 per cent of the total). The majority are concentrated in 7 prefectures (out of a total of 13). The “new generation” of informal buildings consists of constructions of one or two storeys on land parcels of 1,000–1,500 m<sup>2</sup>. Studies indicate that some 93,000 legal and 31,000 informal residences are constructed annually, equivalent to a small town. The biggest problem exists is the Attica region, comprising the greater metropolitan area of Athens and its rapid urbanization. A massive cadastral project under way is expected to provide useful documentation on the current situation with orthophoto maps and a linking of parcels with updated legal rights. A coordination of these data with urban regeneration/upgrading projects is also expected

Sources: Potsiou and Ioannidis 2006, Potsiou and Muller 2007, Potsiou and Dimitriadi 2008.

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The responses to legalization differ according to local context, e.g. types of informal settlements, Governments’ political orientation, and pressure from civil society in general and from concerned communities in particular.

In some countries (e.g. Croatia and Montenegro), legalization is carried out as an integral part of renewed efforts to develop statutory plans regulating development at the local level.

In other countries (e.g. Albania and Serbia), legalization of informal settlements is addressed through special legislation, although implementation has been limited. Albania’s Legalization Law, adopted in 2007, provides special provisions for the informal settlements of the poor to legalize their tenure status despite violation of existing planning and construction legislation. Other countries in the region have similar strategies, although progress in implementation might be uneven.