



Informal settlements

Introduction

In this leaflet we address the challenge of informal settlements across Kosovo. We promote the “right to the city” meaning that every person in the city or community has the right to be an equal member of the community. As an equal member, each inhabitant of the city should enjoy the same level of realisation of his / her rights to an adequate standard of living and access to services.¹

In 2005, Kosovo signed the Vienna Declaration on Informal Settlements, which calls for both the prevention of new informal settlements and the regularisation of the existing ones. The prevention and regularisation of informal settlements was also included in the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan (KSIP) and in its successor, the European Partnership Action Plan (EPAP). The issue of informal settlements is also an important part of Kosovo’s progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Of particular importance are special measures to address the needs of Kosovo Roma/Ashkaeli and Egyptians living in informal settlements (and sometimes displaced as a consequence of the conflict).

This leaflet is the outcome of joint activities conducted by the Working Group on Informal Settlements including Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), Association of Municipalities of Kosovo (AMK), MuSPP/UN-HABITAT and OSCE.

¹See the ‘European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City’ and the ‘World Charter on the Right to the City’.

Living communities



What are informal settlements?

Informal Settlements are human settlements which do not provide their inhabitants the opportunity for enjoying their rights to an adequate standard of living.

An Informal Settlement is characterised as one which:

- ⦿ is unplanned,
- ⦿ has an informal or insecure property tenure,
- ⦿ has an inadequate or non-participation in government, resulting in lack of basic services, registration and infrastructure,
- ⦿ has a vulnerability of discrimination for the residents.

Being informal doesn't mean being transient. Some informal settlements in Kosovo have been in existence for many years, even decades. They are communities of people who have lived together and built what they have with the available resources and with little or no external support. In addition, not all informal settlements are poor. There are also informal settlements resulting from land speculation and irresponsible property developers.

Why do informal settlements develop?

The reasons include:

- ⦿ Unaffordable land and housing for low income groups
- ⦿ Absence of timely urban planning and land management
- ⦿ Absence of policy for social integration of low income groups
- ⦿ Population migration and rapid urban growth
- ⦿ Lack of resources of the urban authority
- ⦿ Irresponsible sub-division of land by private landowners
- ⦿ Lack of enforcement of rules due to weak and ineffective governments

Both curative measures such as regularisation and infrastructure improvement as well as preventive measures such as land policy and construction of social housing are necessary to tackle the problem.





Why must we act on informal settlements?

Tackling deprived informal settlements is a critical part of tackling poverty and improving governance in Kosovo. Inhabitants of informal settlements are often poor people and members of ethnic minorities, and they live without proper access to services.

Water supply, sewage and drainage, paved roads, lighting and electricity supply, public transport and garbage disposal are often unavailable, which creates health and safety hazards.

Residents are vulnerable to discrimination, economic opportunities can be limited and families with insecure land tenure find that they are at risk of losing their homes.

Addressing all informal settlements (poor and non-poor) is crucial to ensure a more sustainable urban development in Kosovo.

What are we aiming to achieve through this process?

The goal of these interventions at all levels should be:

- ⦿ to regulate existing informal settlements and to prevent the creation of new ones,
- ⦿ to ensure sustainable urbanisation in Kosovo,
- ⦿ to improve living standards and alleviate poverty, and
- ⦿ to develop a sustainable spatial planning, land and housing policy for Kosovo.

Achieving this will involve all the relevant stakeholders including the Government of Kosovo, the municipalities and the residents of informal settlements themselves. All informal settlements should be included in municipal development plans and urban development plans and investment should be made to bring services and infrastructure up to the standards of the rest of Kosovo.

In addition, the development of affordable housing schemes and economic development can help to prevent the formation of new informal settlements. Residents contribute through paying taxes and bills and respecting the law. Planning regulations must be enforced through the law for all property developers.

What is the work in progress?

© **September 2007:** Working Group on Informal Settlements established by the MESP to initiate a broad and integrated discussion process leading to the formulation of a 'National Strategy and Action Plan on Informal Settlements'.

© **April and June 2007:** Collaborative workshops were held in Gjakova/Djakovica and in Peja/Pec with the participation of all actors. The workshops included field visits to informal settlements as well as presentations of actions taken so far and recommendations from working groups. These recommendations included the need for interactive debate and strategic development and the need for self-organisation by the affected communities, including ways in which they can contribute to their own development, through community centres, income generation, and diversifying funding opportunities.

© **November 2006:** 'Workshop on Urban Upgrading and Regularisation of Informal Settlements in Kosovo' held by MuSPP/ UN-HABITAT, MESP and the OSCE. All municipalities, relevant ministries, and representatives from civil society and the private sector reviewed the situation in cooperation with world recognised experts and prepared recommendations.

© **Drafting urban development plans:** In addition to community-led initiatives, government plays a crucial role. Informal Settlements must be regularised through the existing planning mechanisms:

- © Municipal Development Plans (MDP)
- © Urban Development Plans (UDP)
- © Urban Regulatory Plans (URP)

Partial and fragmented plans do not have a long-term perspective and population growth means that it is becoming

increasingly important to understand the characteristics of individual informal settlements. The field workshops revealed a diversity of good practice in Kosovo.

These include:

© May 2007 Peja/Pec Municipal Assembly approved the Municipal Development Plan and the Urban Development Plan for 2006 – 2025. The Municipal Assembly declared these plans vital for the economic development and protection of the environment and the cultural-historical heritage of the municipality. Informal settlements across Peja/Pec municipality are now included in the UDP and the MDP.

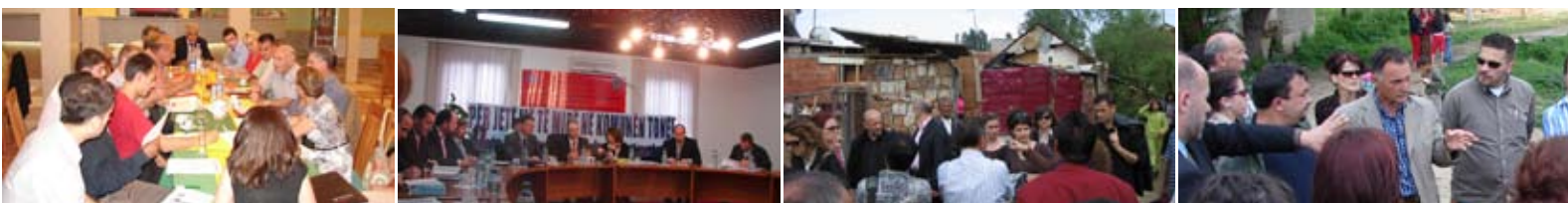
© In Zatra in Peja/Pec municipality the NGO Syri i Vizionit led the community profiling exercise as part of a pilot project on urban planning in partnership with the Municipal Assembly, MuSPP/ UN-HABITAT and other agencies.

© In Brekoc in Gjakova/Djakovica municipality the Regulatory Plan Project was funded by Community Development Fund (CDF). A regulatory plan has been prepared by a consulting firm and a community centre was constructed. Sewage system in this settlement was coordinated with the regulatory plan upon advised by the MuSPP/ UN-HABITAT team.

© MESP developed guidelines and training for all municipalities through CDF

© Amendment of the Spatial Planning Law


These different approaches show both the top-down approach where the regulatory plan follows the MDP, as well as the bottom-up approach where the regulatory plan prompts the development of the MDP.



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