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# FIG WORKING WEEK 2015

## 17-21 MAY SOFIA BULGARIA

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### **FORMALIZING THE INFORMAL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

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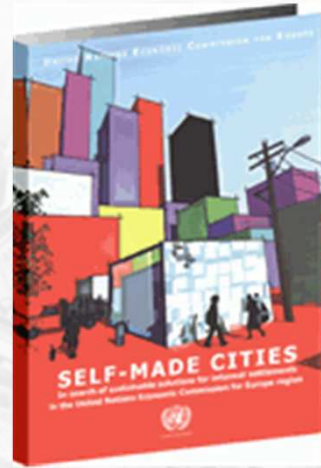


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## Background

- Informal settlements is not a new issue for Europe; **increasingly important the last 25 years**
- Since 2007 UNECE & FIG are involved; ECE CHLM: *Self-Made Cities: In Search of Sustainable Solutions for Informal Settlements (2009)*
- (2015) joint FIG/ UNECE publication: an in-depth research in 5 countries in South- East Europe: Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



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## The study

- Thanks to the FIG & UNECE WPLA for their interest to address this topic
- Thanks to the countries
- Thanks to all sponsors
- Acknowledgement to all contributors

Basic principle:

- **Housing is a way to create wealth; it is directly linked to economic development**

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE  
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SURVEYORS

### Formalizing the Informal

Challenges and Opportunities of Informal Settlements in South-East Europe





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## Why this Study? Housing is important

- *Living in a home that is decent & affordable provides for better health, job / school performance*
- *No country has enough public funds... we need the involvement of private / banking sector*
- *When neither the government nor the private market efficiently provide affordable housing, people turn to informal but "decent" solutions*



Photos by C. Patsiou

**People should not be punished as a result**



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## Findings

- Privatization of land?
- Displaced populations have *not yet been formally integrated (no citizenship) & cannot equally enjoy access to land and ownership rights*
- Planning and construction permits are time and/or cost consuming; no social housing
- Formal real estate markets provide *expensive housing*



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## Findings

- Informal houses are outside the economic cycle
  - Formalization? many countries still follow various "transition" strategies with conflicting, complex and unclear land policies
  - Ecological and other concerns imposed by a country's constitution
- and
- Policies promoting state-owned land can exacerbate the problem or delay/den



## Examples of good practice

- *Legalization is the only practical solution*
- *Title provision at affordable prices, for primary residence, with a planning amnesty*
- unless the occupied state land is protected ...?
- In case of squatting on private land is not extensive; adverse possession or purchase of land



Photo by C. Potsiou

*affordable, inclusive, fast and*





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## Weaknesses

- Priority to planning issues prior to property registration and titling...this *significantly delays the whole procedure*
- There is either *governmental indifference* or *lack of awareness* of the impact such a delay in legalization has on national economies
- Expensive & time consuming procedures, documentation/mapping, penalties and high property taxes



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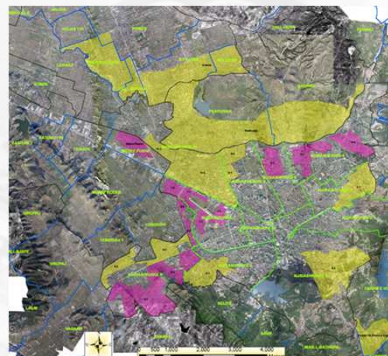


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## Our recommendations

- Legalization within specific zones
- Periodical automatic monitoring of protected sensitive areas
- Legislation should not include deadlines unless major reforms are adopted.
- Reforms refer to *pro growth planning, construction permitting system & adoption of affordable housing tools*



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## Our recommendations

- Adopt affordable fees and penalties for legalization for the poor and the middle class.
- Do not retroactively enforce state ownership rights over land.
- Develop mechanisms to legalize properties where there is standing land tenure.



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## Our recommendations

- Adopt mechanisms that encourage new structures to be built in the formal sector.
- Planning amnesty programs & flexible zoning is the key.
- All properties should be allowed to be mortgaged and transferred regardless of condition.
- A detailed and costly survey of an existing informal construction may not be of great value.



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## The role of the public

- An active involvement of the public is necessary
- The public must [redacted] term viability of [redacted] project
- The public (both [redacted] have built legally [redacted] who have not) must [redacted] understand the [redacted] legalization for [redacted] all



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## Concerns & Future Research in the Region

- In natural-hazard-prone areas, [redacted] safety controls prior to issuing [redacted] an operation permit are [redacted] necessary in cases of informal [redacted] construction for professional use [redacted] accommodating many people.
- There is a need to quantify the [redacted] economic, environmental & [redacted] social impact of "bad" land [redacted] policies
- There is a need to improve the [redacted] functioning of housing markets



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*Thank You*



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