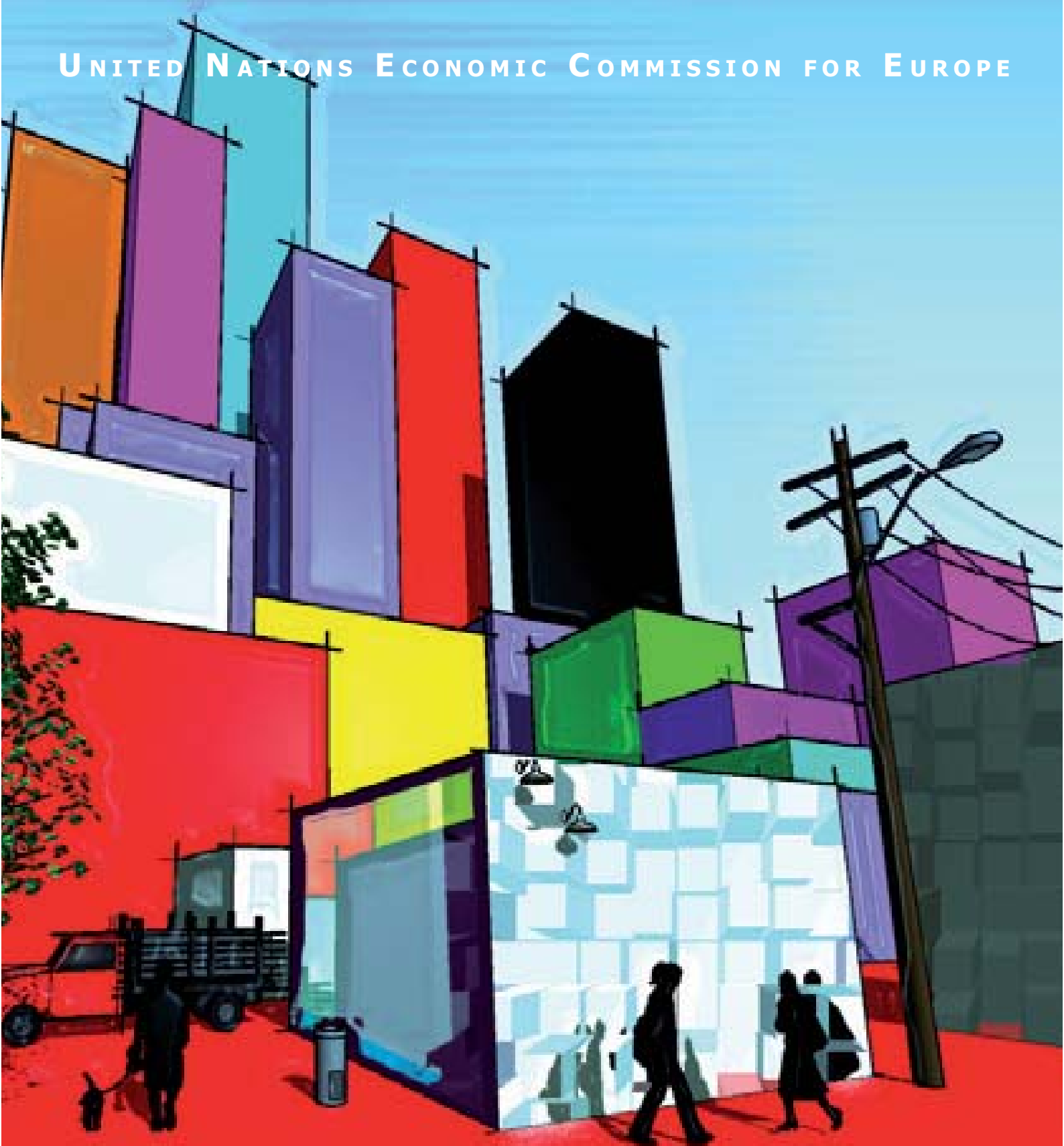


UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE



SELF-MADE CITIES

In search of sustainable solutions for informal settlements
in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region



UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS
New York and Geneva, 2009

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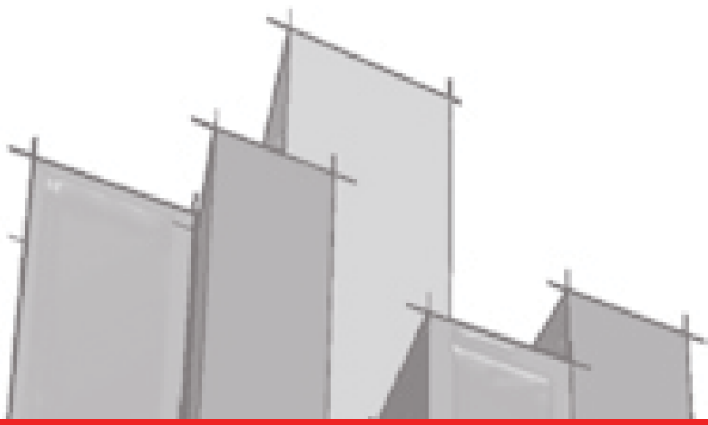
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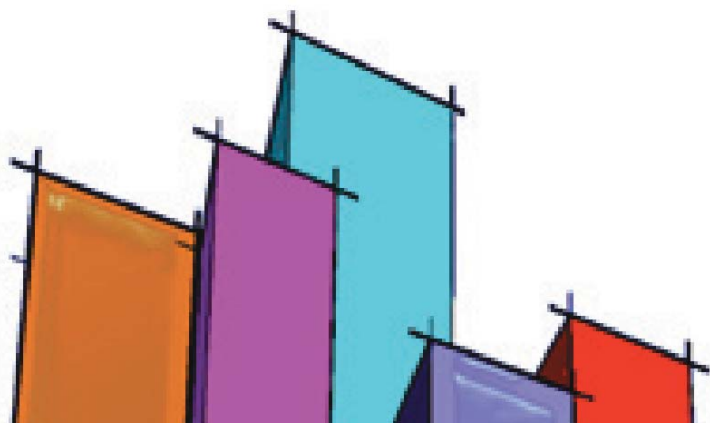
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Foreword

More than 50 million people in 15 member States of the United Nation Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) live in informal settlements. Rapid urbanization, poverty and lack of access to land and ownership, in addition to limited or no social housing, have led citizens to build their homes illegally under very poor environmental and social conditions. The phenomenon is growing at an exponential rate in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and calls for urgent political, legal and planning solutions.

Over the last 20 years, a number of UNECE countries with economies in transition have had to undertake dramatic policy changes, including land reforms and the massive reallocation of State and private assets.

The economic problems and social stresses related to the transition to new housing and land management systems have added to the many other challenges. In some cases, the lack of a clear and transparent scheme for land tenure and property rights has compounded the problems of already poor administrative and cadastre systems, and hence contributed to the formation of informal settlements.

This study provides a general overview of the phenomenon of informal settlements in the UNECE region and identifies policy responses to address these challenges. Emphasis is given to practices that can facilitate access to affordable land and housing and improve the livelihoods of residents in informal settlements, and in general to strategies that stand to better the physical, social, economic and environmental situation of informal settlements.

The study has four specific objectives:

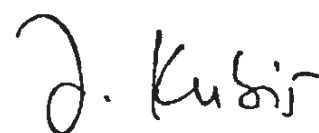
- a. To describe the factors that influence informal settlement development and to define the main characteristics of different types of settlements;
- b. To review the major constraints in the existing housing, land management and planning systems that exacerbate the problems of informal settlements, and thus provide an analysis of social, economic and political issues that have a direct influence on the urban development patterns in countries;

- c. To provide an overview of the different policy approaches and actions that address the issue of informal settlements which have been implemented at the international, national and local levels, ranging from regularization to upgrading to resettlement;
- d. To provide some general guidance that could support decision makers and planners in addressing the challenge of informal settlements.

The analysis here highlights major achievements in addressing the multiple dimensions of informal settlements in cities across the region. The conclusions draw attention to alternatives for local, national and global action and provide guidance on how to face the challenges that informal settlements pose.

This study is the outcome of the joint work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management and the Working Party on Land Administration, which took place in a series of meetings, dedicated workshops and research activities.

I trust that the study will assist policymakers, decision makers, planners and local authorities in their efforts to improve living conditions in informal settlements and/or find alternative solutions. As the first study of its kind in the region, it is hardly an endpoint for the work on informal settlements by Committee and the Working Party. Rather, it is an initial step towards the development of practical and capacity-building activities in this area, which will facilitate the implementation of sound policies and actions.



Ján Kubiš

Executive Secretary

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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