



Urban Law

What is Urban Law?

Urban law is the collection of policies, laws, decisions and practices that govern the management and development of the urban environment.

UN-Habitat's work on urban law focuses on its institutional priorities and the needs of Habitat Agenda Partners. This leads to an emphasis on particular areas, including:

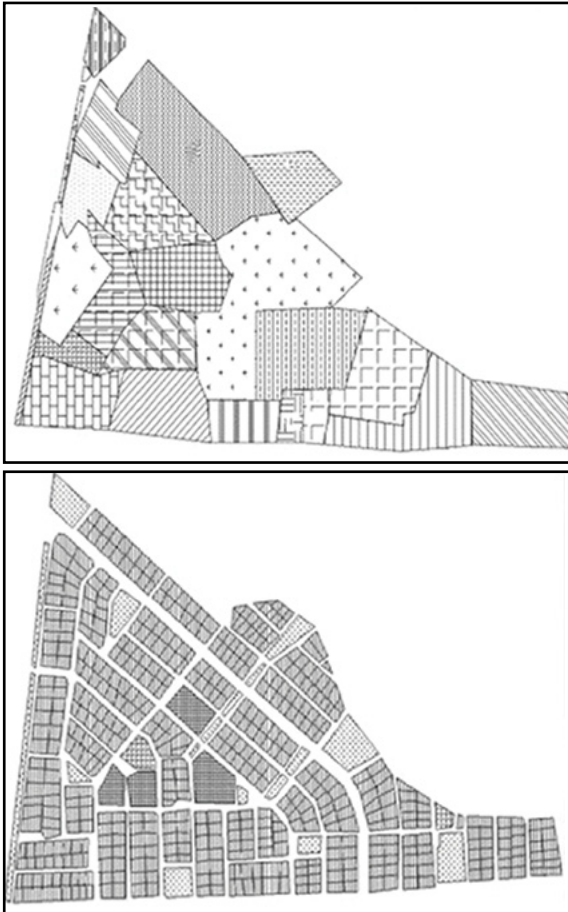
- Planning for city densification and extension;
- Land management; and
- Innovation in urban development financing.

These areas are considered with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, the poor and the socially marginalised.

In addition to its institutional priorities, UN-Habitat recognises that supposedly discrete technical fields frequently interconnect in practice and is also committed to providing information and sharing experience in all areas of urban law whenever the opportunity arises.

Why Urban Law?

The urban environment is extremely complex, being the focus of human economic, social and political activity throughout the world. Any decision on its management can have a profound impact for millions. However, these decisions can be extremely challenging, often involving conflicting individual and collective interests. As a result, law plays a fundamental role in the management and development of the urban environment. It sets the 'rules of the game' for all interested actors. It promotes accountability and provides the basis of stability and predictability in decision-making. Law is also one of the principal guarantors of liberty and equality, providing an opportunity to ensure that the vulnerable and disadvantaged are heard, considered and protected.



Land Readjustment in Turkey: before and after

UN-Habitat and Urban Law

Urban areas dominate national economies, drive technological development and provide shelter and livelihoods for the majority of the World's population. They are also the scene of many social, economic and environmental challenges. As a member of the United Nations Development Group, UN-Habitat is mandated by the General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. This work is based on the Habitat Agenda, and particularly its "Strategies for Implementation", which includes commitments to:

- Review restrictive, exclusionary and costly legal and regulatory processes, planning systems, standards and development regulations; and
- Adopt an enabling legal and regulatory framework based on enhanced knowledge, understanding and acceptance of existing practices and land delivery mechanisms so as to stimulate partnerships with the private business and community sectors and
- Put into effect institutional and legal frameworks that facilitate and enable the broad based participation of all people and their community organizations in decision-making of human settlement strategies, policies and programmes.

UN-Habitat recognises urban law as one of the foundations of effective urban management and development. Well formulated law based on sound policy supports effective implementation. It creates a stable and predictable framework for both public and private sector action, and can guarantee the inclusion of the

interests of vulnerable groups while also providing a catalyst for local and national discourse.

UN-Habitat works with partner countries and local governments to support the improvement of their law making processes as they affect the urban environment. This may involve the reform or development of a particular tool or a broader review of the urban legal framework as well as sharing information and experiences among countries.

UN-Habitat's approach to Urban Law

Drawing upon its mandate, UN-Habitat has recently re-stated its view of the Urban Development Paradigm, including that:

- Robust legislative frameworks must underpin all planning;
- On-going dialogue between legislation, policy and planning to ensure relevance, innovation and a capacity to meet the future challenges facing cities;
- Development and planning must have a clear and unequivocal rights based approach; and that
- Local governments provide an exciting entry point for change and should be encouraged to create enabling regulations.

UN-Habitat also believes that 'rights based' legislation can help promote participation and the Agency is, therefore, committed to the everyday involvement of urban dwellers in the development decisions and planning outcomes that affect their daily lives.

UN-Habitat's work on Urban Law operates on several levels:

1. Developing programmes among UN-Habitat branches and offices, as well as other partners, to deliver integrated packages of assistance for urban development.
2. The development of innovative approaches, tools and methodologies to particular problems in urban law reform.
3. The creation and sharing of information about urban law.

In undertaking this work, UN-Habitat places a priority on practical interventions that are tailored to national and local contexts and needs. Of necessity, these priorities depend upon effective partnerships with local authorities, local experts and affected communities.

Through this approach, UN-Habitat provides the support local and national governments need to incrementally improve their urban legal frameworks while also developing innovative solutions to shape future urban development.

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