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## Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Housing and Land Management

**Seventy-fifth session**

Geneva, 8-9 October 2014

**Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda**

**Review of the implementation of the programme of work 2014-2015**

**Sustainable housing and real estate markets**

### **Proposal for a study on standards related to the work under the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management**

**Note by the secretariat**

*Summary*

To support the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the UNECE region for the period 2014-2020 (ECE/HBP/2012/3), the secretariat elaborated a proposal for a possible study on standards. The secretariat presented this proposal at the meeting of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management Bureau on 7 May 2014. The Bureau supported this proposal.

This document contains the proposal for the study on standards. The Committee is invited to discuss and endorse this proposal

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## I. Introduction

1. According to a survey among member States, “Challenges and priorities in housing and land management in the UNECE” (ECE/HBP/2013/2), some of the key challenges faced by member States are: an inefficient use of energy in the residential sector; limited access to affordable, quality and healthy housing in the market; lack of easy access for disabled and aged persons due to physical barriers; and risks to residential buildings from natural and human-generated disasters, including the impacts of a changing climate and earthquakes.

2. Building on the outcomes of this study and discussions at the seventy-third and seventy-fourth Committee sessions on future work priorities, the Committee developed the “Strategy for sustainable housing and land management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020”. The strategy was adopted by the Ministerial Meeting on Housing and Land Management in October 2013.<sup>1</sup>

3. According to the strategy, the Committee shall organize its activities through, among others means, the harmonization of methods and definitions at the regional and international level and shall support the development of common terms, language definitions and standards. The strategy specifically mentions standards related to barrier-free, good-quality, healthy and secure housing and utility services (objectives D and E of the strategy). Such standards, if widely used across the UNECE region, would contribute to addressing the main housing challenges.

4. This background paper provides a definition of standards, explains some benefits of the application of standards and formulates recommendations for possible Committee activities in this field.

## II. Definition and benefits of using standards

5. Standards are documents based on voluntary compliance and established by consensus and approved by a recognized body. They provide for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context. Standards should be based on the consolidated results of science, technology and experience, and aimed at the promotion of community benefits.<sup>2</sup>

6. Technical regulations are mandatory requirements for the design, content, operation, and disposal of products to protect health and safety or minimize environmental damage.

7. Standards may be international or national. International standards are those developed by international standards organizations, such as, for instance, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). These standards are available for consideration and use worldwide. Governments also develop national standards, which fit specific country conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/sust.hsng.strategy.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Standardization (ISO) website.

[http://www.iso.org/sites/ConsumersStandards/1\\_standards.html#section1\\_1](http://www.iso.org/sites/ConsumersStandards/1_standards.html#section1_1).

8. The benefits of the use of standards are widely recognized. The application of standards:
- (a) Promotes the harmonization of common practices, procedures and product specifications to allow compatibility across borders, in the case of international standards, and within countries, in the case of national standards. The use of international standards enables the creation of harmonized, stable and globally accepted frameworks of technologies, best practices and agreements, which support sustainable development;
  - (b) Encourages better access to new technologies and best practices by reducing costs and complexity, opening markets and promoting broader access to products and services;
  - (c) Ensures lower risk of proliferation of non-compliant and often dangerous goods and practices across countries and increased safety through harmonized and up-to-date processes and measures;
  - (d) Supports the use of clear and transparent rules, which improve consumer confidence and protection and safeguard the interests of key stakeholders.
9. Standards can be used to show compliance with the requirements set by technical regulations and help minimize eventual inconsistencies between countries.

### III. Previous work of the Committee on standards

10. From its establishment in 1947, the Committee has actively promoted building codes and standards. The Committee's former Working Party on Building conducted analyses of national building regulations in the UNECE region and promoted the international harmonization of their technical specifications.<sup>3</sup> A number of studies were developed and published, including the "List of international standards and similar documents relating to building activity" (ECE/HBP/48/Rev.1), "Building regulation in ECE countries" (ECE/HBP/52), "International harmonization of building regulations in the ECE region" (ECE/HBP/62), and "International harmonization of approval and control rules for buildings and building products" (ECE/HBP/67). *ECE Compendium of Model Provisions for Building Regulations* (ECE/HBP/55), which constitutes a synthesis of the Committee's experience gained in this field, was published initially in 1985 and updated several times.<sup>4</sup>

11. The Committee discussed standards again at the Committee's seventy-fourth session in 2013 when the Real Estate Market Advisory Group presented a report on certification systems for green buildings. The report concluded that there is a lack of harmonization between existing building certification systems and there is a need for further activities on standards in housing and land management.

12. Following this discussion on standards for buildings, the secretariat established contact with the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies. This body serves as a forum for the development of best practices and promotes a better understanding of standards, technical regulations, conformity assessment and market surveillance as tools for the management of risks confronted by consumers, businesses, communities and authorities, and for the achievement of policy goals in all sectors of economic activity. This Working Party is the only United Nations intergovernmental body that has standards-related issues as a focus in its mandate. ISO and the European

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<sup>3</sup> See International Harmonization of Building Regulations in the ECE Region (ECE/HBP/62).

<sup>4</sup> The latest version is ECE/HBP/81/Rev.1.

Committee on Standardization, which develop international standards, are members of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies.

#### **IV. Proposed activities**

13. The secretariat proposes to prepare a study on standards to assist in the implementation of the adopted strategy for sustainable housing and land management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020. This can be done through a joint informal network of experts and in cooperation with the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies. The study could be prepared through hiring consultants and the organization of meetings of experts. Work is contingent on the availability of extra-budgetary funds.

14. Based on the priorities identified in the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management 2014-2020 and the Committee's programme of work 2014-2015, the following thematic priorities for the study on standards are proposed:

- (a) Energy efficiency of buildings, including manufacturing of building materials and energy performance requirements<sup>5</sup>;
- (b) Building codes and standards;
- (c) Social responsibility in the private sector for disaster risk reduction and risk management;
- (d) Other construction codes for healthy and barrier-free housing;
- (e) Land registration and smart cities.

15. The Committee is invited to discuss and endorse this proposal.

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<sup>5</sup> *Action Plan for Energy-Efficient Housing in the UNECE Region* (ECE/HBP/164) identifies four goals in policy area II, "Energy performance standards and technology integration": (1) energy performance requirements for homebuilding and existing housing; (2) low energy and low carbon technology; (3) spatial planning development control and district heating and cooling systems; (4) research, innovations and best practices.