



# UNECE Weekly

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## Georgia housing - a considerable maintenance backlog

The UNECE carried out a fact-finding mission to Georgia on 26 May-3 June, at the request of the Minister of Economic Development of Georgia, Mr. Irakli Chogovadze. The aim of the team, which included 3 external experts, was to study various aspects of the housing sector of the country and to derive preliminary policy recommendations on how to alleviate housing problems.

### Maintenance and repair backlog

During the study visits in Tbilisi and Gori experts inspected the condition of the existing housing stock and the related infrastructure facilities. A considerable backlog in maintenance and repair was found. Furthermore, urban planning tools and a management approach for the multi-family housing stock need to be introduced and strengthened. The foundation of several hundreds of homeowners' associations in a project initiated by the municipality of Tbilisi is an important step in this direction. Illegal construction, extensions to existing buildings and the preservation of the historical city are also problems that need to be addressed.

Other relevant aspects were analysed with national and local authorities, international organizations, NGOs and the private sector (developers, banks). The existence of institutions with a clear

mandate and a well-defined division of responsibilities is crucial for the success of housing policies. The consolidation of the legal framework, access to mortgage markets for the population and attempts to provide affordable housing for vulnerable



Problematic extension in Tbilisi

households are some of the future policy challenges.

The findings of the UNECE expert team were presented at an interministerial meeting on 3 June, attended by officials of different Ministries as well as Parliament Committees. It was agreed to cooperate closely in preparing the final report and implementing the recommendations. ✨

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## Question of the week

### Are agricultural standards levelling out our tastes for good?



To Claudio Meza, UNECE expert in Agricultural Quality Standards

### Are UNECE agricultural standards levelling out the taste of the people of the region?

There is a risk that by defining too many criteria to be fulfilled by fruits entering the UNECE market we will end up by having everyone having the same taste or possibly tasteless products. However, consumers have very specific demands. While in certain countries people prefer more acid fruits, in others they like sweeter ones.

Member countries are now in the process of defining a range of acceptable sweetness. Using these ranges exporters will know where their product can be sold and importers will know where they will be able to buy the most appropriate product to satisfy their consumers. One thing has to be taken into account, however – it is sometimes very difficult to scientifically measure the sweetness of a product, especially in so far as the time to do these measurements is very limited. The controllers should be able to do it at once because time is a key factor to ensure the products' freshness. Another problem is that the level of sweetness of a product will be different between the moment it is exported and the moment it arrives in the importing countries. These are some of the problems that are being discussed during our meetings on standardization of fresh fruits in order to ensure that consumers get the best possible products.

## City planning – driving force for development

The issues of sustainability and globalization, in view of their importance in urban and regional development, have featured in a number of UNECE conferences on urban and regional research. The 10th conference, held in Bratislava (Slovakia) on 22-23 May brought together researchers, planners and policymakers from 27 UNECE countries to discuss "City as a living environment and as driving force for development" and "How can polycentricity of territorial development

improve functional integration?". The conference concentrated on how specific instruments – planning and urban design



– and their changing decision-making framework – governance and participation – can redefine





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the public interest in territorial development and contribute to more liveable cities and city networks. Planning and urban design were reconfirmed as two essential instruments which can assist cities to become driving forces of development.

The discussion further explored the concept of polycentricity and the contribution it is expected to make towards more balanced territorial development and social inclusion at different spatial scales. It focused on

the influence of cities in facilitating competitiveness, innovation and growth by harnessing the synergy of polycentric networks of cooperation, coordination and complementarity.

The conference was organized in cooperation with the Council of Europe's European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) and at the invitation of the Slovak Ministry of Construction and Regional Development.✳

More information and response papers are available at [www.unece.org/hlm](http://www.unece.org/hlm).



*cont.* Do many countries outside the UNECE region attend our meetings on agricultural standards?

Yes indeed! For example, at our recent meeting on meat standards, a number of countries from Latin America participated. For the meeting on fresh fruits we had countries from all over the world participating, because the UNECE is the only place where such standards are elaborated. This week there will be a meeting on dried fruits and Tunisia, which is not a UNECE member country, will participate.

For exporting countries it is of the utmost importance to participate in the discussions to make sure that their product will correspond to the standards elaborated by the UNECE and thus will not be excluded from international trade. If they want to access the markets of the UNECE region, which is by far the biggest importing region of the world, they have to comply with UNECE standards, which in many cases have also been taken up by the European Union. These standards should be seen as a way to make international trade more transparent, to facilitate exchanges and to protect consumers. The UNECE standards contribute to reassuring each one of us that the agricultural products we consume are the best possible ones. ✳

For more information contact [agristandards@unece.org](mailto:agristandards@unece.org).

### Switzerland creates pollutant register

Information concerning the release of certain pollutants and the transfers of certain waste will be accessible to the public under an ordinance introduced by the Swiss Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communication (DETEC). Swiss officials announced on 6 June that about a thousand medium-sized to large establishments will be legally required to notify public authorities of the release of pollutants exceeding a given threshold. The list of pollutants includes fine particulates, CO2 and heavy metals.



By founding this Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, which will be available to the public, Switzerland will implement key provisions of the UNECE Kiev Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention. Switzerland signed the Kiev Protocol in May 2003, and it is expected to enter into force in 2007. ✳

For more information on the Swiss PRTR ordinance, see <http://www.news.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/fr/5445#>.

### Coming up ...

12-14 June

Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

12-14 June

Group of Experts on Radioactively Contaminated Scrap Metal

12-16 June

Meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit)

13-15 June

Conference of European Statisticians (OECD, Paris, France)

For further information please contact:

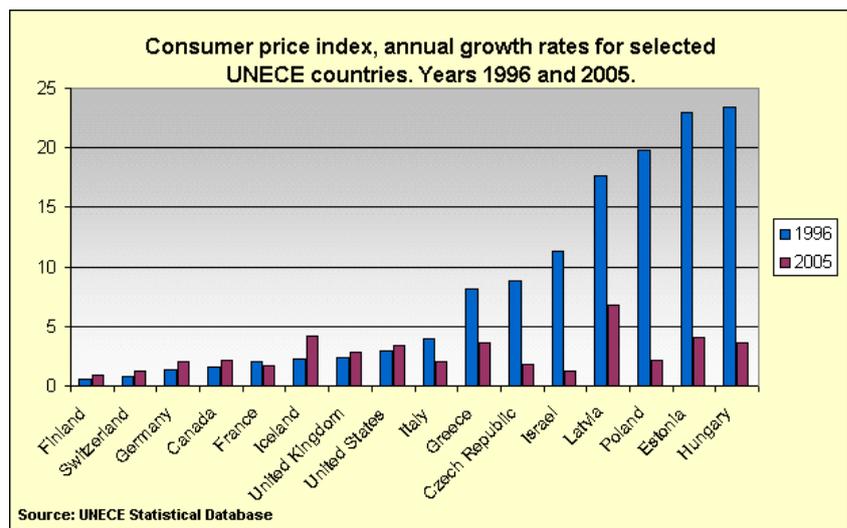
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### Facts and figures

#### Inflation in selected UNECE countries



The graph shows the rates of inflation as measured by the annual increase in consumer prices in selected UNECE countries for the years 1996 and 2005. During this period the overall difference between countries with the lowest and highest inflation narrowed significantly.

In 1996, Finland had the lowest inflation of 0.6% while Hungary had the highest, 23.4%. In 2005, Finland had the lowest inflation of 0.9% while Latvia had the highest inflation of 6.8%. Between 1996 and 2005, France, Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Estonia and Hungary all recorded a reduction in inflation, while the remaining countries recorded moderate increases, with Iceland recording the largest increase from 2.3% (1996) to 4.2% (2005).