



United Nations

UNECE Weekly

Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 404 — 20 - 31 December 2010

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OF UNECE WEEKLY
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CENTRAL ASIAN STATES FINALIZE THE THIRD ARAL SEA BASIN PROGRAMME

On 15 December 2010 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the Board of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) reviewed the draft of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme and submitted it for approval at the highest political level to IFAS member States. The Programme is a regional action plan for 2011–2015 to alleviate the environmental and socio-economic consequences of the Aral Sea disaster and to facilitate progress towards integrated water resources management and sustainable development in the Aral Sea Basin.

The mandate to develop the new Programme came from the IFAS Summit (28 April 2009, Almaty), where the Heads of Central Asian States expressed their firm commitment to strengthen institutional and legal frameworks for regional water resources management and tasked the Executive Committee of IFAS to develop the new Aral Sea Basin Programme. Since then, a series of meetings of the five Central Asian countries and their regional organizations took place to discuss the needs and priorities for the new Programme. The Executive Committee also established regular coordination with international organizations and

donors to ensure support by the international community. UNECE's project "[Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia](#)", financed by the Government of Germany through Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH in the framework of the Berlin Water Process, assisted the IFAS Executive Committee in implementation of the Summit's decisions.

Last week, efforts to prepare a well-structured, effective and realistic action plan culminated in the adoption of the Statement by the Donors and Implementing Agencies on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme. The Statement confirms that donors fully support the Programme and are ready to work together with the Executive Committee of IFAS and the Governments of IFAS member States in its implementation.

The new Programme covers four areas: integrated water resources management; environmental protection; socio-economic issues and institutional and legal strengthening of water management in the region. It is expected to

contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, improve preparedness to address new challenges, including climate change, and foster integrated water resources management at the national, river-basin and regional levels. □

For further information please visit:
<http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.htm>
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WORKSHOP ON ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

25-26 NOVEMBER 2010, SKOPJE



The secretariat of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) organized a

workshop in Skopje to foster the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the South-Eastern Europe subregion by promoting the use of electronic information tools.

The workshop, organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, gathered public officials, policy makers and information technology specialists alongside representatives from non-governmental organizations and E-tools experts.

Different examples showcased the benefits of using E-tools to improve access to environmental information, public participation and access to justice. In addition, a couple of practical examples of pollutant release and transfer registers systems were presented. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss funding possibilities for promoting

the use of E-tools in the SEE region and to join a practical session on the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy.

Presentations on public participation included the following subjects:

- Identifying guiding principles for creating efficient online consultation processes that include the need of:
 - having clear objectives for the procedure,
 - making the relation to non-virtual and alternative methods of participation as clear as possible,
 - tailoring the material presented to the public for a high degree of accessibility,
 - offering prompt feedback to the comments submitted.
- Bearing in mind all possibilities offered by the use of modern social networks vis-à-vis the more "traditional" E-tools;
- Creating "civic conversations from the noise of the social web";
- Planning ahead bearing in mind the e-tools accessible by the target community;
- Identifying the most active e-participants to help catching their attention to the consultation from its beginning;
- Creating a social media strategy addressing these and other important issues in order to accomplish an effective public participation.

As regards access to justice, participants reviewed the E-file system implemented in Estonia as well as various examples of information and communication technologies applied under the different European judicial systems. □

All presentations are available on the Aarhus Convention website: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/electronictools.htm>.

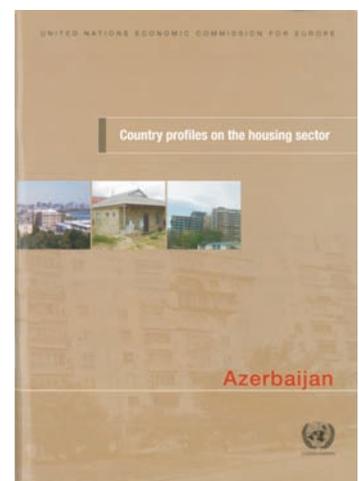
OFF THE PRESS

COUNTRY PROFILE ON THE HOUSING SECTOR: AZERBAIJAN

The country profile on the housing sector of Azerbaijan is the fourteenth in the series published by the Committee on Housing and Land Management. This study provides an in-depth analysis and policy recommendations to help policymakers develop strategies and programmes.

It also focuses on the specific challenges or achievements in the housing sector that are of particular concern to Azerbaijan, namely: spatial planning and land administration; new and existing housing stock and the financial framework. □

The publication is available at:
<http://www.unece.org/hlm/prgm/cph/countries/azerbaijan/cpazerbaijan.full.e.pdf>.



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