

Housing



Housing poverty - a headache for Eurasia

Eurasia is often thought of as having more developed housing than many other parts of the world. Recently, however, international attention has been focusing on several types of "housing poverty" in the region.

For example, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan around 70% of dwellings lack a bath or a shower. In Uzbekistan, this figure is more than 80%. And in the rural parts of Kyrgyzstan, only 17% of homes have piped water.

In the EU, housing-related expenditure is the largest component of consumer spending. According to the International Union of Tenants, in 2012 it accounted for 23% of total household expenditures. For 12% of the population, it accounts for 40% of their expenditures.

In the past relatively little attention was paid to energy efficiency in construction and in heating systems. As a result, for households living in older buildings, including a majority of the poor, energy bills are now very high and many people are living in energy poverty. According to the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, every tenth person in the EU lives in a household that was unable to pay its utility bills at some time during the last year.

Problems such as these prompted five international organizations to organize a second "Housing Forum: Europe and Central Asia" as a platform for decision-makers to explore solutions to housing challenges in these regions. These organizations are: Habitat for Humanity International, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Development Programme, UNECE and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

The Housing Forum was held from 22 to 24 April at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland. Participants discussed ways to address housing problems, develop affordable housing solutions for the poor and bring together businesses and the public sector in order to accomplish these objectives.

In his closing statement at the Forum, Sven Alkalaj, UNECE Executive Secretary, reminded participants that over 50 million people in the UNECE region still live in informal settlements. Many homes are not sufficiently insulated. Systems for maintaining and developing homes that meet the needs of poor and vulnerable groups need to be improved. He also reiterated the UNECE's commitment to addressing these housing challenges. He said, "I am confident that the outcomes of this Forum will provide an important input to the high-level discussion at the UNECE's Ministerial meeting on housing and land management, which takes place this October, where Ministers from throughout the region will set policies and discuss how they can work to resolve housing and land management challenges".

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=31595>

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Innovation

UNECE supports Kazakhstan's efforts to promote innovation

UNECE is helping Kazakhstan to prepare a methodology for the development of innovation systems in its regions. The seminar organized by the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Kazakhstan and the National Agency for Technology Development with the expert contribution of UNECE, in Astana on 19 April 2013, marked the first step in this process.

The contribution of UNECE to this ongoing policy initiative reflects the agreed collaboration with the National Agency for Technological Development to support the implementation of the recommendations of the [Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan](#) published by UNECE in 2012. The Review contained a recommendation that encouraged the authorities to continue their efforts to reach the regions with their innovation support initiatives.

The seminar was opened by Mr. Asset Issekeshov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Mr. Kanysh Tuleushin, Vice-Minister of Industry and New Technologies, presented the current draft of the methodology. The international experts mobilised by UNECE introduced different international experiences and contributed to the lively debate that ensued on how to promote regional innovation and address the different institutional, legal and financial issues involved in policy design.

The importance of regional (sub-national) factors in determining overall innovation performance is increasingly recognised worldwide. It is recognized that an important dimension of effective regional innovation policies is the active participation of the main innovation stakeholders, both in the formulation and in the implementation of strategies, so that potential opportunities and the necessary actions to exploit them are identified. The event was attended by many regional deputy governors and senior officers of the presidential administration, in addition to representatives from other public and private organizations.

Close relations between research organisations and business have an important influence on innovation performance. Mr. Asset Ishekeshev described current efforts to develop an innovation infrastructure in the regions to facilitate this interaction. New possibilities are opened by the introduction of a 1% income tax on natural resources to finance innovation related expenditures. Mr. Josep Miquel Pique, President of the European Division of the International Association of Science Parks, emphasized that the connectivity of innovation agents and the quality of educational institutions are key elements in any regional innovation strategy. □

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/innovationperformancereviews.html>

PPPs

Mobilizing financial resources for developing parts of the Arab-speaking region

ESCWA, together with Morocco's Ministry of Equipment and Transport, held an expert group meeting in Rabat on 17 and 18 April on "Unlocking Infrastructure Investments and Mobilizing Financial Resources in the Arab Region".

The meeting identified sectors and activities that would benefit from advisory services for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in partnership with the UNECE International Centre of Excellence in PPPs. It also served as a platform for launching the ESCWA initiative on Infrastructure Investments and Public-Private Partnerships, also in cooperation with UNECE.

The Arab countries in this region provide an excellent example of how PPPs can be used. Their economies are growing and the demand for better infrastructure is evident. For Morocco, renewable energy is an interesting avenue to explore, as the climate—both meteorological and political—is very attractive for investment in this sector. For Libya, it would be interesting to follow the path that Norway or the Netherlands took, using revenues from oil for their PPPs.

What is also helping the region is the funding strategy of oil-rich countries such as Dubai and the United Arab Emirates. These are willing to invest in the region, preferably or exclusively with Islamic financing. All major companies and organizations working in the Middle East or Kazakhstan are already using or at least start with Islamic financing.

One of the initiatives proposed at the meeting was to combine Islamic financing with PPPs. Dubai is examining the possibility of setting up a specialist centre on PPPs, with ESCWA knowing the region and having the network, and UNECE having the expertise in public-private partnerships.

The meeting was a good example of very close cooperation between ESCWA and UNECE in PPPs and ESCWA's strong commitment to supporting the programme of the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence. □

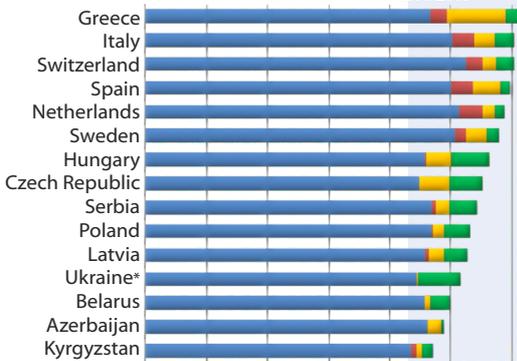


Facts and Figures

Women throughout UNECE region postpone childbearing

Average age of women at birth of first child, 10-year changes since 1980

■ Mean age in 1980 ■ Increase 1980-1990
■ Increase 1990-2000 ■ Increase 2000-2010



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database (<http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/>)

*Increase over 1990-2000 refers to 1980-2000.

Women throughout the region are waiting longer to have babies. We see this trend in almost all countries in the region, including in those where at the turn of the new century the average age at which a woman was having her first baby was already 29.

Between 2000 and 2010, women in Greece, Italy and Switzerland were waiting an additional one and a half years, and in 2010 the average age when they first gave birth had climbed to 30.

In the Czech Republic and Hungary, between 1990 and 2010, women were postponing giving birth for the first time by an average of five years. In this same period, women in Ukraine were waiting an average of another 3.1 years, in Belarus 2 years, and just 1.4 years in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan.

In many countries in Central Europe, the average age had already started to rise from around 22 and 23 years in the 1990s. In Eastern Europe, this started to happen after 2000.

The trend is attributed to improved educational opportunities, difficulty in combining work and motherhood, more widespread use of modern contraception and changing norms about the timing of childbearing. □

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