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**SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND
MANAGEMENT**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its seventieth session, in September 2009, the Committee on Housing and Land Management will need to adopt a new programme of work for the period 2010–11 and prepare for a Ministerial Meeting to be held in 2011.

In order to better contextualize the proposals for the next programme of work, the present note provides a short summary of the Committee's focus and work since its creation and the current challenges for the Committee as defined in the *ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century*, which was adopted by the Ministerial Meeting in 2000 and discussed by the last Ministerial Meeting in 2006.

As requested by the Bureau of the Committee (ECE/HBP/2008/10) the note then identifies some areas of interest to the Committee and makes proposals for specific issues to be tackled in the coming years, in particular through the next programme of work and possibly the Ministerial Meeting in 2011.

I. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE¹

1. The need for UNECE to address housing and land management issues was initially linked to the housing shortage arising from the destruction of the Second World War, the cessation of construction activities in the war period and subsequent population growth. The 1947 Panel on Housing Problems had to address reconstruction issues at the intergovernmental level, including policies to transform building construction from a handicraft to a truly industrial process.
2. UNECE, through the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, continued to address the increasing urban problems in the 1960s, when the provision and allocation of land and the control of land prices for housing and related facilities became a concern. At the time, emphasis was also placed on the quality of dwellings and on improving housing standards.
3. During the 1970s, the Committee started looking at the future of housing and land policies in the region and addressing more comprehensively human settlements strategies by applying a more interdisciplinary approach in its studies and work. During this period, the Committee also addressed the impact of energy considerations on the planning and development of human settlements.
4. The financing of housing remained a priority item on the Committee's agenda from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, with several studies being developed on the issue. The Committee also began to address the maintenance and modernization of buildings, which later resulted in studies and efforts to find better and more economical methods and to improve technology.
5. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the scope of the Committee broadened to include a range of urban issues, including the quality of the built environment as a whole. Urban renewal became an important theme, as did urban planning. Since these issues were intrinsically linked to infrastructure development and allocation, land-use policies became an issue of concern for the Committee, and urban and regional development became subjects of its work and research.
6. The Committee was more and more focused in the early 1980s on the qualitative aspects of human settlements, predicting that in the following decades "The main emphasis will be placed on policies relating to the improvement, rehabilitation and renewal of the existing building infrastructure rather than to quantitative growth which was the main preoccupation of the past decade. Problems of environmental protection and energy conservation are likely to be in the focus of interest for the international cooperation in the field of human settlements"².
7. In the 1973 study *Housing Requirements and Demand*, it was noted that "The housing problem could not be easily solved during one or two decades and that, as soon as housing requirements estimated at present had been met, other and new housing needs would emerge"³. The predictions were confirmed, as the focus of the Commission was enlarged to address, by the early 1990s, the urban realities of the new member States from the old Soviet bloc then joining UNECE. The Committee was exposed to the new challenges of countries moving from a socialist regime to an open market society.
8. While quality of housing remained an issue, more compelling problems of housing and land administration, related to the sudden processes of privatization, characterized the new

¹ Information contained in paragraph are contained in United Nations publication E/ECE/962, "Three decades of the United Nations Commission for Europe", chapter IX on Human Settlements.

² United Nations (1978), "Three decades of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe" (E/ECE/962).

³ Idem.

Committee's agenda. Despite a large stock developed in Soviet times, the housing stock turned out to be insufficient for fast-growing populations and large migrations from the rural areas to cities. Moreover, the construction quality of the buildings called for immediate maintenance and reconstruction.

II. CHALLENGES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A. The 2000 Ministerial Meeting and the ECE strategy

9. The transition process, which involved more than 20 of the UNECE member States, in particular in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), also brought about new challenges in intergovernmental work on housing and land management. Participants at the 2000 Ministerial Meeting recognized that for many UNECE countries one of the main challenges was the transition to a market economy, and indicated the need for Governments, in cooperation with major stakeholders, to design and implement policies that set targets for the public sector while using markets in a flexible and innovative manner. The need for new and better infrastructure and housing was also stressed, together with the need to develop new services while avoiding urban sprawl.

10. Further issues to be addressed highlighted by the Committee in 2000 were:

- (a) The need to strike a balance between private and public housing;
- (b) Urban renewal, and the need to establish public/private partnerships to this end;
- (c) The need to improve environmental performance of cities;
- (d) Land administration as a tool to promote development and sustainable land use;
- (e) Good governance at the local level.

11. The *ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century* (hereinafter, the Strategy) adopted at the 2000 meeting also recalled the rationale behind the establishment of the Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) in 1996, which had responded to the needs to promote:

- (a) Land administration through security of tenure;
- (b) The establishment of real estate markets in countries in transition;
- (c) The modernization of land registration and cadastre systems in the market economies.

12. The Strategy also recalled how the Brundtland report of 1987 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Conference) of 1992 had signalled a new direction in planning, building and management of settlements, towards the promotion of:

- (a) Appropriate building technologies and ecologically sound design;
- (b) Low energy consumption and promotion of renewable energy;
- (c) Selective and efficient use of resources and recycling;
- (d) Ecological principles to guide settlement development and land use;
- (e) Public participation in the decision-making process.

13. In particular, the Strategy set out a series of goals for each of the five identified challenges, summarized below:

- (a) *Promotion of governance systems that respond to the needs of local communities.* This goal included identification of a more coherent governance framework for human settlements and assistance to UNECE countries for the development of related

programmes, a policy focus not only on legal and juridical systems but also on the distribution of administrative and financial decision-making at different levels of government; and the integration of major groups into policymaking;

- (b) *The improvement of urban performance.* The achievement of sustainable and liveable cities was considered the main challenge of the Committee. Related issues were urban renewal, the encouragement of sustainable consumption patterns, effective land-use planning to avoid urban sprawl, the restoration of urban heritage, the improvement of infrastructures, better traffic management, and the creation of a network of green corridors maintaining natural landscapes and protecting forests;
- (c) *The facilitation of social cohesion and security.* This goal included programmes to build and modernize the social-housing stock, encouragement of town planning policies aimed at limiting the formation of ghettos and enhancing security, respect for minorities in the planning of human settlements, the legal protection of disadvantaged portions of population, and the establishment of a system of recording landownership and use;
- (d) *The promotion of the market reform in the housing and urban sector.* Such promotion included: the need for advice on housing policies, to eliminate bottlenecks in the housing sector; support to countries in transition on spatial planning and the development of institutional structures; developing political instruments for spatial planning; improving local transport; designing national housing programmes; and reforming spatial and urban planning legislation;
- (e) *The improvement of land and real estate markets and securing private rights in land,* including through land management registration, the exchange of information on land administration issues, strengthening institutional and organizational management, supporting land administration activities and technical and expert assistance to countries.

B. The 2006 Ministerial Meeting

14. The most recent Ministerial Meeting, held in 2006, discussed issues related to the changing situation in the UNECE region. Areas of more extreme, multiple deprivations have emerged in many parts of the region. In some neighborhoods, persistent high unemployment, poor housing and physical environments, low educational attainment, high crime rates and other socio-economic problems interact to generate decline and distress. Shrinking public resources and the process of economic transformation, in particular in EECCA and SEE countries, pose considerable challenges to meeting the need for affordable and adequate housing.

15. Significant challenges have also been noted in Western Europe. Structural economic changes and unemployment have led to urban segregation and the emergence of deprived neighborhoods. Limited access to public and private services and decreasing human security pose serious challenges to residents. Tightening public budgets have resulted in less investment in social housing.

16. The Ministerial Meeting further discussed:

- (a) The benefits of a good land administration system, which can guarantee ownership and security of all types of tenure as well as support urban planning, economic development and good governance;

- (b) Adequate spatial planning, which contributes to improving the local physical, social and economic environment, achieving more efficient patterns of spatial development; controlling urban sprawl, balancing urban expansion and urban regeneration, providing adequate location and provision of infrastructures and facilities, improving transport systems, and promoting participation and community involvement;
- (c) The issue of informal settlements and distressed urban areas, which was also highlighted as one of the major challenges, and the lack of planning and adequate housing policies, which was identified as the main cause. The improvement of living conditions in informal settlements was seen as one of the complex and pressing challenges facing many UNECE countries today.

17. The 2006 meeting reconfirmed that the goals and challenges contained in the Strategy would continue to serve as the basis for future programmes of the work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management.

18. Effective urban planning and management, the promotion of neighborhood regeneration (mainly through integrated urban renewal programmes), the refurbishment of the multifamily housing stock, and better access to affordable and adequate housing, infrastructure, facilities and public spaces were also listed as priorities for the UNECE region that should be addressed through the Committee's work. It was also noted that effective management of large multifamily housing estates should be further addressed by the Committee.

C. The 2008–2009 programme of work

19. The overarching issues above were translated by the Committee into specific activities reflected in its programme of work, which in the last two years has tackled the following issues:

- (a) Housing policies, strategies and institutional and financial frameworks, in particular through the development of a number of country profiles on the housing sector;
- (b) Improvement of urban performance, through work on spatial planning;
- (c) Land registration and land markets, through the work of WPLA, including the land administration reviews and the establishment of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group;
- (d) Distressed urban areas, through the work on informal settlements;
- (e) Housing modernization and management, through the work on condominiums, social housing and housing finance systems, as well as multifamily housing;
- (f) Energy efficiency in housing.⁴

III. PROPOSED ISSUES FOR NEXT PROGRAMME OF WORK AND MINISTERIAL MEETING

20. While the programme of work for 2008–2009 was able to address a number of specific and key issues, many remain challenges the Committee should address.

⁴ For more detailed information on the current programme of work, see also document ECE/HBP/2008/1.

21. Keeping as a reference the goals of the Strategy, the ministerial discussions and emerging issues of interest to member States, as well as current activities of the programme of work to be continued after the current biennium, it is suggested that following areas be considered:

- (a) *Housing policies and strategies: the country profiles.* The country profiles on the housing sector should be continued: (i) to assist countries develop appropriate housing strategies and plans at the national level; (ii) to advise countries on institutional, planning and financial issues; and (iii) to develop related tools. Synergies with the land administration reviews should be sought, whenever feasible. This would support the achievement of all the goals of the Strategy, in particular its goal number 4, on the promotion of the market reform in the housing and urban sector;
- (b) *Urban performance: urban sprawl.* As a follow up to the study on spatial planning, the issue of urban sprawl should be addressed. As recent country profiles have shown, low-density development of city outskirts is becoming a very costly and unsustainable development pattern for many cities in EECCA and SEE countries. Since this phenomenon of low-density development of city outskirts is also being experienced in western countries, albeit in different ways, it would be important for the Committee to review the issue in depth to identify patterns and solutions to the related problems. This issue is also linked to energy efficiency in urban areas, as low densities engender the use and development of unsustainable transport systems and increase heating costs, financing and urban management, along with generally extended urban infrastructures and services; in environmental terms, they create larger ecological footprints of larger urban areas. This would support the achievement of goal 2 of the Strategy, on the improvement of urban performance.
- (c) *Housing modernization and management: housing performance.* The Committee has already initiated work on the issue of energy efficiency in housing, and is undertaking work on multifamily housing. The Committee's activities are focused on identifying ways to improve housing performance and its overall efficiency. It is suggested that the Committee continue to address housing performance, including lowering energy consumption and identifying appropriate technologies and materials, as well as sound design to limit the environmental impact of housing. This should focus in particular on realities where refurbishment is a priority, and should be linked to strategies for multifamily building management and retrofitting. This would also support the achievement of goal 2 of the Strategy.
- (d) *Governance: public participation processes.* One of the emerging problems in the realities addressed by the Committee is the lack of clarity with regard to the responsibilities of different stakeholders. For instance, often the private sector does not find an enabling environment allowing the full deployment of market tools; in other instances, government relies heavily on the market dynamics, losing responsibilities that should remain public. The distribution of housing and land management responsibilities between the local and central levels is also an issue, as is the role of the civil society and its participation. As part of its work on governance, the Committee could initially address processes for public participation in housing and land management decision-making. This would be in

support of goal 1 of the Strategy, on the promotion of governance systems that respond to the needs of local communities.

- (e) *Neighbourhood regeneration: social cohesion and security.* Deprived neighbourhoods, urban ghettos and social discrimination are an increasing reality and an urgent matter to address for the whole UNECE region. The integration of minorities and the related housing problems are high on the agenda of many countries, and directly relate to security and development issues. The Committee could address this issue and undertake an in-depth review of distressed neighbourhoods throughout the region. This would support the achievement of goal 3 of the Strategy, on the facilitation of social cohesion and security.
- (f) *Land registration and land markets: the role of the real estate market.* As part of the WPLA programme of work, the real estate market aspect could be reinforced, in particular through the input of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group (REM). Work on the good use of market tools could be developed by REM, in cooperation with the Committee, to encompass housing matters as well. This would support the achievement of goal 5 of the Strategy, on the improvement of land and real estate markets.

22. At its sixty-ninth session, the Committee may wish to:

- (a) Review the information contained in this note;**
- (b) Consider and review the proposals above for the next programme of work and make further suggestions;**
- (c) Select an issue for in-depth discussion at the Committee's seventieth session;**
- (d) Request the secretariat to prepare, for the Committee's seventieth session, a draft programme of work for the period 2010–2011 containing an update of the current activities, if still ongoing, as well as new proposals.**
