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**REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2008–2009
AND DRAFT PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2010–2011**

HOUSING MODERNIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP ON HOMELESSNESS

Note by the secretariat

Summary

A workshop on the topic of homelessness was held on 18 and 19 May 2009 in Oslo in accordance with the Committee on Housing and Land Management's programme of work for 2008–2009 (ECE/HBP/149, para. 22 and annex I, item 10.1.4). This document summarizes the main outcomes of the event, which discussed challenges related to homelessness and policy responses across countries of the United Nations European Commission for Europe (UNECE) region. Presentations and discussions addressed questions of data collection methodology and the measurement of homelessness as well as national experiences with the implementation of public policy. One recommendation of the workshop was that the Committee find ways to further focus its activities on homelessness as an important aspect of housing affordability.

I. BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The workshop was organized and hosted by the Norwegian State Housing Bank under the aegis of Committee on Housing and Land Management. It was held on 18 and 19 May 2009 in Oslo.

A. Main objectives

2. The workshop aimed:

- (a) To identify methodological problems in the measurement of homelessness across the UNECE region;
- (b) To discuss recent experiences to address the problem of homelessness, with a focus on prevention;
- (c) To assess the need for further work of the Committee on this subject.

B. Attendance

3. A total of 47 participants from various levels of government as well as research institutions and civil society organizations attended the event. These included representatives of homeless groups. The following member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) were represented: Armenia, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

4. Representatives of the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) attended, as did members of the UNECE secretariat.

C. Opening of the workshop

5. The workshop was opened by the Deputy Director of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development of Norway, who welcomed participants on behalf of the Government of Norway and delivered an opening statement. This was followed by a keynote speech by the Director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (a former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations) on the theme: "Fighting for Social Justice during the Economic Recession". The speeches were followed by remarks from the UNECE secretariat on the Committee's current activities, and by a representative of the Recovered Addicts Interest Organization (RIO), Norway, who presented the perspective on homelessness of a civil society organization.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Participants agreed that homelessness is a severe state of deprivation of basic human needs and that the problem poses a threat to the social cohesion of cities. Participants suggested that the reduction of homelessness should be included among the social objectives of any

housing policy. Further study regarding connections between housing policy and the availability of affordable housing was deemed necessary.

7. There were no generally adopted definitions of homelessness among UNECE member States. However, the use of reliable and objective statistics was necessary to facilitate cross-country and intertemporal comparisons. Knowledge of the extent and manifestations of homelessness was a crucial element to supporting strategic actions to combat homelessness. At present, there was generally a shortage of knowledge on the number of homeless people in several UNECE countries, as some countries had not yet undertaken comprehensive surveys on the subject. Further work needed to be carried out to develop adequate measurement tools.

8. Access to adequate and affordable housing of a normal standard was described as a fundamental component of public policy addressing homelessness. A general shortage in affordable housing increased the extent and the plight of homeless people.

9. The causes of homelessness were complex and varied across countries and regions, over time and among respective homeless individuals. There were indications that homelessness was on the increase among groups that had previously only been marginally affected, e.g. women, youth and families with children.

10. Best practice in dealing with homelessness varied according to the nature of the housing market, existing housing policy and the nature of the specific homeless population. Accordingly, there was a need to tailor policies to national and local realities.

11. Valuable information on experiences and policy developments in the region called for an increased focus by authorities on the need for prevention and cost-efficiency.

12. Experiences and research results were presented to strengthen the case of “housing first” (as opposed to extended periods in temporary shelters) as a preferred option for assisting the homeless population. Participants stressed that the approach should not be interpreted as “housing only”, but rather should be combined with required follow-up support in the form of social services.

13. Homelessness called for holistic approaches that must not be limited to the housing policies alone. Solving the issue required actions that cut across several sectors, including social policy, employment and housing finance.

14. Participation and inclusion of organizations of vulnerable groups were also crucial if efforts and policies to solve homelessness are to succeed.

15. Lack of coordination among decision makers and inflexible administrative structures could create situations in which homelessness is aggravated.

16. The cultural attitudes that discriminate against homeless people could create additional barriers that needed to be addressed in efforts to solve the problem. As policies changed, they should be accompanied by alternative attitudes to dealing with homelessness. These should be more closely linked to the implementation of public policy and the provision of social services.

17. Strategies with respect to homelessness should also include various approaches to prevent the relapse into homelessness by groups of formerly affected individuals. Yet only a minority of UNECE countries had separate strategies for dealing with recovered homeless people.

18. Strategies to deal with and prevent homelessness should guide both national and local policies. The overall national strategies should outline general plans and objectives, as well as provide details about the responsibility and commitments of the national authorities, local governments, the private sector and civil society. There was a particular need to create an ownership of goals and strategies at the local level.

19. Participants stressed that UNECE could develop and make available to member States guidelines on available tools and methods for surveying and addressing homelessness including measurement of the following variables: (a) the extent of homeless people in each country; (b) their living conditions and current whereabouts; and (c) the individual and structural reasons for homelessness.

20. It was recommended that Committee publications also address the issue. For instance, the country profiles on the housing sector could include a section on homelessness. The preparation of a special monograph on the issue of homelessness could also be considered.

21. Further cooperation with member States and civil society organizations could help better identify relevant indicators and measurement methods as well as information on other questions related to homelessness. Participants also recommended that UNECE continue to promote special events to this effect.

22. UNECE could assist in clarifying how policy solutions to homelessness and the availability of social/affordable housing are interconnected. For this purpose, it was recommended that UNECE work closely with the European Union and the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT), as well as with the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS), FEANTSA and other civil society organizations.

23. UNECE was encouraged to facilitate bilateral cooperation by assisting with provision of the contact information of experts working with homelessness in various member States. Participants also recommended that the UNECE assess the possibilities of developing a database of lessons learned and pilot projects.
