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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Housing and Land Management

#### Seventy-second session

Geneva, 3 - 4 October 2011

#### Item 4 of the provisional agenda

#### Review of the programme of work

## Summary report on workshops organized under the Programme of Work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

### *Summary*

To streamline the reporting procedures of the Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM), the Bureau of the Committee agreed that a single document containing short summaries of the workshops held during the intersessional period should be presented to the Committee. Hence, the present note contains an overview of workshops organized under the programme of work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management since its seventy-first session, held in September 2010.

In line with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Technical Cooperation Strategy, these activities focused on countries with economies in transition, were provided at the request of Governments and/or the recommendation of the Committee, and implemented in those areas where the Committee has a clear comparative advantage over other organizations. Most of the activities were carried out in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, as well as the private sector. Particular attention was given to the involvement of beneficiary countries and the use of national expertise to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of technical cooperation activities implemented under the Committee's programme of work.

## **I. Workshop on the Role of Spatial Planning to Improve Security of Tenure in the UNECE region**

1. The workshop was held in Antalya, Turkey, on 28 and 29 October 2010. It was organized by the Working Party on Land Administration in cooperation with the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre of Turkey.
2. The workshop was attended by representatives of Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)).
3. The goal of the workshop was to improve the understanding of the role of spatial planning and the responsibilities of land-administration authorities for reducing the spread of informal settlements in the UNECE region.
4. Informal settlements are improvised dwellings where housing has been constructed without the requisite legal title for use of the land. Today, more than 50 million people in this region live in informal settlements. In some cases, due to the lack of affordable housing, poor quality dwellings are built on public or private lands with no legal ownership rights. In other cases, good quality housing is built without planning permits and in violation of land-use plans. In consequence, its occupants can have neither security of tenure nor access to basic infrastructure (such as potable water and sanitation) or services (e.g. schools, hospitals and public transportation). Informal settlements are also often built in hazardous locations and their occupants suffer social segregation.
5. Representatives of the Government of Turkey described work being done at the local and national level to address this issue. They emphasized that the authorities aimed to promote urban and rural settlements that were well structured, enjoyed balanced growth and offered a high quality of life for residents. To achieve this goal, preventive action should be taken that is directed at the root causes of informal settlements (e.g. migrations, natural disasters). To carry out this action, different institutions and organizations are working together. For instance, the Housing Development Administration was created to provide loans for the development of village architecture, the transformation of squatter areas, preservation and renewal of historic sites and local architecture, as well as for enacting social housing policies and infrastructure.
6. Representatives of other Governments in the UNECE region emphasized the value of well-coordinated spatial planning and land-administration policies and the importance of integrating strategies currently employed by separate public institutions. Streamlining registration and conveyance procedures and reducing their cost would not only safeguard the interests of owners but also of those who might have legitimate claims on the land they inhabit but lack the necessary legal titles to utilize their assets productively.
7. Main conclusions and recommendations
  - (a) Spatial planning is one of the most important areas for policy action to address informal settlements. In particular, land-administration authorities have a key role to play in policy implementation related to spatial data management and in the streamlining of cadastre activities and registration procedures.
  - (b) The provision of information is critical for managing spatial development because it supports the formulation and implementation of effective human

settlements policy, which must also integrate environmental protection requirements. Land administration and spatial planning are fundamental land tools and they should be used in a coordinated manner to achieve the best results.

- (c) The European Union INSPIRE Directive provides useful guidance for ensuring the interoperability and sharing of data. Housing, land and spatial planning should also constitute part of an integrated national strategy to address poverty reduction and general economic development.
- (d) With regard to best practice based on international experience in promoting security of tenure, security of tenure should be interpreted as a continuum of policies gradually to improve access to land rights. Especially in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition, Governments should review policies that aim to universally regularize all settlements, and focus instead on a mixture of policies on such issues as sound emergency access to infrastructure, the creation of effective conditions for individual upgrading, as well as affordable multi-apartment housing as an alternative to regularization.

More information on this workshop is available at:  
<http://live.unece.org/hlm/wpla/workshops/welcome3.html>

## II. Joint Seminar on "Land Use Planning Around Hazardous Industrial Sites"

8. The Seminar on Land Use Planning around Hazardous Industrial Sites was held in The Hague, the Netherlands, from 11 to 12 November 2010. It was organized jointly by the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the Committee on Housing and Land Management. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment of the Netherlands hosted the seminar.

9. The joint seminar was attended by experts representing land use and/or safety authorities from the following countries: Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the Joint Research Centre of the European Union, Shell Netherlands B.V., Polski Koncern Naftowy Orlen S.A., GCE Group, ICARO, Zoi Environment Network, and the European Environmental Bureau were also present.

10. The seminar facilitated the dialogue to build a better understanding between stakeholders working on industrial safety and land use planning on how to ensure safe neighbourhoods around major hazardous industrial facilities. The seminar also sought to offer a platform for the exchange of views and experiences between authorities and the private sector on land use planning and industrial safety issues.

11. Participants in the workshop emphasized that safety aspects were not well integrated in land use planning and that cooperation was lacking between the main stakeholders. This results from limited communication and lack of access to information. Participants highlighted the lack of transparent procedures that would give direct responsibilities to all parties involved in the process of land use planning and safety. It was emphasized also that authorities should be proactive to identify groups of stakeholders likely to be affected by land use development projects and involve such groups at an early stage in those projects.

12. Main conclusions and recommendations

- (a) In order to ensure better cooperation, countries should consider introducing transparent procedures that would impose cooperation or mandatory communication between parties involved in safety and land use planning at an early stage of any development. Alternatively, a protocol setting out obligations on ‘who does what’ should be introduced;
- (b) Effective cooperation should be strengthened also through organization of meetings for land use and safety agencies at national and local levels aimed at building understanding and trust between them;
- (c) Geographical Information Systems should include risk assessments associated with hazardous industrial sites, and/or databases with relevant information should be developed;
- (d) Land use plans for areas in vicinities of hazardous industrial sites should be reviewed by safety authorities before their approval;
- (e) The workshop recognized the usefulness of the meeting and recommended future periodic meetings at the international level as a way to exchange experiences and ideas. Other recommendations on the international level included the need to develop criteria/standards for land use planning and safety, and prepare publications containing best available practices from the respective countries.

### **III. International Forum on Natural Disasters and Building and Construction Safety**

13. The “International Forum on Natural Disasters and Building and Construction Safety” was held in Baku on 16 and 17 November 2010. It was organized by UNECE in cooperation with the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan, which hosted the event.

14. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Australia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Georgia, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, the United States of America, and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the United Nations Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were also in attendance.

15. The workshop was organized as a contribution to the launching of the UNECE Country Profile of the Housing Sector Azerbaijan, as the Committee wished to put building safety higher on its agenda, following the frequent natural disasters in the region and their impact on human settlements.

16. The objective of the International Forum was to examine case studies related to disaster prevention and post-disaster management, and highlight the importance of being proactive in assessing danger, taking into account the specificities of each country in the UNECE region.

17. Participants in the Forum discussed various policy mechanisms aimed at improving disaster preparedness in the region, and showcased a number of best practice examples of spatial planning strategies in disaster-prone areas such as utilizing local knowledge and the use of traditional local building material for the construction of affordable earthquake resistant houses. The Forum also addressed such issues as improving land use planning in

disaster-prone areas and its integration in strategies and action plans at the national level thereby promoting this issue as an integrated part in educational programmes in urban and spatial planning.

18. Main conclusions

- (a) The risk of natural disasters is widespread throughout the UNECE region. It affects countries in all sub-regions, from North America through Western, Southern and South-Eastern Europe to Central Asia. Specific regional risks vary by geography and geology. Each country should evaluate their situation, study the potential for natural disasters, conduct disaster risk assessments and provide clear maps of areas/buildings at risk;
- (b) Natural disasters, like earthquakes, hurricanes or flooding, cause severe material devastation and human casualties. To improve national disaster risk preparedness, there is a need to strengthen national institutional capacity in this area, develop effective legal frameworks by introducing new building codes and practices, monitor and enforce building code application in new construction, introduce sound land use planning in disaster prone areas, and inclusively engage varied government and civil society interests;
- (c) Success in reducing disaster risk requires effective coordination of disaster risk reduction at the national level, involvement of local authorities and expertise in the development and implementation of disaster reduction action plans, and effective collaboration and partnerships between central and local governments and civil society.
- (d) UNECE sub-regions share important characteristics in building types, income levels, geography and geology. Moreover, there are similarities and solutions, which can be evaluated and adjusted for each particular situation. It is important, that national Governments involve their municipal governments in the learning process and in sharing their experience in this area;
- (e) While safe building stock should be ensured everywhere, and especially in areas prone to disasters, in many countries, and particularly those with economies in transition, there is still a big gap between existing seismic and other regulations and their practical application and enforcement. In addition, many single-family houses in rural areas are not built in accordance with building regulations because many households cannot afford the approved building materials. Therefore, the enforcement of adequate national building codes is crucial to make buildings disaster resistant and to enhance sustainability in the region;
- (f) Raising public awareness of building safety and disaster risk reduction by the use of appropriate communication methods is crucial.

#### **IV. Training workshop on access to justice in urban development**

19. UNECE and UNDP organized a joint training workshop to address the question of access to justice in urban development. This training targeted public and private lawyers in Georgia and representatives of this country's Ministry of Economic and Sustainable Development. The workshop was held in Tbilisi, Georgia on 22-23 November 2010.

20. The training brought together 30 national representatives involved in legal aid activities in Georgia. The event counted on interventions by international and national

policy and legal experts. It followed-up the findings of UNECE's country profile on the housing sector of Georgia (2007), which recommended the implementation of capacity building activities focused on providing training to government officials.

21. It is known that Georgia has faced difficulties related to the housing sector development in the post-Soviet period. The privatization of homes affected over 90% of the housing stock, bringing about a series of challenges which are shared with other post-socialist countries. These include the poor maintenance of already deteriorated multi-storey buildings, the proliferation of informal settlements and the lack of access to security of tenure for vulnerable populations.

22. These problems were further exacerbated by natural disasters and military conflicts in recent years. As a consequence, the living conditions of socially disadvantaged groups, internally displaced persons, ethnic minorities and women deteriorated.

23. Participants in the training event learned from experts' advice on good practice policy in the housing sector and on several aspects of existing legislation in Georgia. Topics discussed included aspects of housing privatization law, mortgages law, neighborhood law and international experiences on the legal empowerment of the poor. The work of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management and its Working Party on Land Administration to provide policy advice in the area of informal settlements and security of tenure in the UNECE region were also discussed.

24. It is expected that the training of legal aid officers for the provision of information, legal advice and litigation in the interest of vulnerable groups will contribute to improvements in their access to justice, thus contributing to a more inclusive social and economic development in Georgia.

25. As a follow up to this event, the UNDP office in Georgia and the UNECE secretariat are considering the possibility of co-organizing another training event in 2012 for government officials working on housing and land administration issues.

## **V. International Forum on "Greening Real-Estate Markets"**

26. The workshop was held in Dessau, Germany, on 29 and 30 November 2010. It was organized by the UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group in cooperation with the Federal Environment Agency of Germany, which hosted the event.

27. The workshop was attended by representatives of the Government of Germany as well as private sector, non-governmental organizations and academia from countries in the region.

28. Considered as a focal point for many services and industries, the real-estate sector has a key role to play in adapting to climate change in the UNECE region. A more intensive use of green technologies by developers could radically transform the city landscapes of the region. Furthermore, it has been estimated that green investments can have a substantial multiplier effect on a country's gross domestic product, in addition to savings in building operation costs for families. Overall, consolidating the necessary adaptations will require not only funding, but also motivation and awareness among citizens.

29. The objective of the workshop was to exchange information on best practice experiences in promoting green economies in the real-estate sector from a multi-stakeholder perspective.

30. The UNECE secretariat presented the contents of the Action Plan on Energy Efficient Housing, which aims at reducing the carbon footprint of the housing sector in the

UNECE region, and outlined its policy goals, targets for policy action, indicators of achievement and a vision for the year 2020.

31. The Real Estate Market Advisory Group summarized the findings of the study *Policy framework for sustainable real estate markets: principles and guidance for the development of a country's real estate sector*, which among its principles emphasizes the need to introduce reforms in order to better appraise the use of green technologies in the valuation of real-estate units.

32. Speakers and participants reviewed the economic and social benefits associated with a green real-estate sector. Challenges that were identified included the impact of a more intensive use of green technologies on the durability of homes, related operations and maintenance costs for families and the need to better calibrate subsidies and tax incentives to facilitate green retrofits of existing housing stock; the importance of the use of ICT technologies by cadastre authorities to better quantify the potential for in-house energy generation with solar panels; the need to update value appraisal practices of buildings to better quantify the effect of green investments; and the impact of a green real-estate sector on the comfort of living spaces and health of populations.

33. Main conclusions and recommendations

- (a) Uniform global valuation standards should be set for all properties that incorporate green technologies, as a way of recognizing the importance of these technologies.
- (b) The potential of ICT technologies as applied by Government authorities should be exploited to improve accessibility of information for real-estate market actors.
- (c) Concerted action by all stakeholders involved will be needed in order to implement the Action Plan for Energy Efficient Housing in the UNECE region, and the main principles and recommendations for developing sustainable real-estate markets.
- (d) An interdisciplinary approach for the development of green real-estate markets needs to be applied, bearing in mind the linkages between the ecological, financial and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable and green real-estate sectors.

More information on this event is available at:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/umweltoekonomie-e/veranstaltungen/greening/index.php>

## **VI. Training workshop on “Affordable Housing Provision in CIS countries”**

34. At its first session held in January 2010, the CIS – UN-HABITAT Cooperation Commission invited UNECE and UN-Habitat to develop a training programme focused on affordable housing. The training workshop on “Affordable Housing Provision in CIS countries” was organized in response to this invitation and in line with the cooperation agreement between the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) and the Moscow Project Office of UN-Habitat.

35. The training workshop was held in Raubichi, Belarus from 14 to 17 March 2011. It was organized jointly by UNECE, UN-Habitat and the Ministry of Architecture and Construction of Belarus, which hosted the event.

36. The workshop involved nine countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and brought together 32 government officials and experts who are directly responsible for housing policy development and implementation.

37. The overall objective of the training was to strengthen the capacity of national experts to address the challenge of affordable housing. The workshop provided experience-based knowledge and international case studies illustrating various policy approaches developed in the UNECE region to secure access to housing.

38. Ensuring the affordability of housing and its energy efficiency remains a challenge in the UNECE region, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe and CIS. Housing costs are constantly increasing, which has serious consequences for the population, and especially for vulnerable groups. Inadequate instruments for financing public housing, underdeveloped or unbalanced housing markets, and a lack of local and national capacity further reduce housing affordability and increase the number and size of informal settlements.

39. Presentations at the workshop highlighted the most common challenges to ensuring sustainable housing in CIS countries, and provided expert advice on how to develop effective policy responses. They also showcased good practices in achieving affordable and energy efficient housing.

40. The workshop devoted particular attention to those issues that were identified as priorities by participating countries such as social and rental housing; legal mechanisms to secure housing accessibility; financial and economic aspects of social housing provision; policies and technological aspects of housing energy efficiency; and, the maintenance and management approaches to multi-family housing.

41. Main conclusions:

The workshop led to the identification of a number of country-specific needs and areas that could be addressed by future capacity-building activities in support of the development of a sustainable housing sector in CIS countries. In particular, the participants suggested a number of new topics for future joint UNECE - UN-Habitat training courses in CIS countries, such as rental housing; housing condominiums; energy efficiency in the housing sector; sustainable urban planning; housing needs assessment; housing policy formulation; and, financing at the local level. As indicated in the evaluation forms, all participants expressed interest in continuing such a training programme, including through national capacity-building activities to be focused on areas of specific interest to a host country. More information on this workshop is available at: [http://www.unece.org/press/pr2011/11hlm\\_p01e.htm](http://www.unece.org/press/pr2011/11hlm_p01e.htm)

## **VII. First Housing Forum: A vision for housing in Europe and Central Asia**

42. The First Europe and Central Asia Housing Forum was held at the European Youth Centre in Budapest, Hungary, from 4 to 6 April 2011. The forum was the first of its kind and organized jointly by Habitat for Humanity, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The forum was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

43. The Housing Forum was attended by approximately 150 delegates from 48 countries and organizations. The organizations included representatives from across the housing

sector, including the civil society, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and organizations in the field of policy and research on the subject matter.

44. The main objective of the Housing Forum was to bring key actors of the sector from Europe and Central Asia together to create a vision for housing in the region. As the issue of housing remains generally low on the agendas across countries, the forum sought to bring attention to the subject by creating a platform for exchange, mutual learning and action.

45. The participants of the Forum discussed four main aspects concerning housing; the political; the environmental; the financial; and the link between housing issues, human development and poverty reduction. A number of challenges in putting housing high on the political agenda were discussed, including the crucial role of effective policies and governance for the development of a well functioning housing sector. It was concluded that housing issues were generally politically unattractive and financially expensive while effective solutions to the existing challenges were often non-standard and highly complex.

46. Participants addressed the accessibility of housing both as an important element of social cohesion and a fundamental human right. To overcome the challenges in providing sustainable and affordable housing, it was suggested that policies should pursue people-centred models, which focus on the importance of housing to social development.

47. Potential solutions, however, depend heavily on the developers and on the financial institutions, as these have the power to influence future housing policies of a country. The importance of joint collaboration between non-profits, the private sector and the public sector was, therefore, emphasized.

48. As part of the forum's programme, UNECE and its Real Estate Market (REM) Advisory Group organised a parallel session on issues of affordable and ecological housing and sustainable real estate markets. The session featured a series of presentations by members of the Committee and the REM Advisory Group addressing the principles of affordable, healthy and ecological housing in the region, the contribution of energy efficiency measures to improving the affordability of housing and achieving other social and economic benefits, and the role that UNECE policy framework for the real estate sector could play in promoting sustainable development, particularly in countries with weak legislative frameworks in this area. The event also gave an opportunity to present and discuss the Action Plan for Energy-efficient housing developed by the Committee, and to share best practices in developing social housing in countries in transition and promoting housing finance opportunities for individuals and communities.

49. Main conclusions and recommendations:

The Europe and Central Asia Housing Forum 2011 was the first housing forum in the region, and the start of a continuing cooperation between different organizations on this subject. The Forum led to the identification of the many issues facing the housing sector, and drew attention to the importance of cross-sector collaboration in order to catalyze change and find innovative housing solutions. Future work will include looking at the people-centred models the participants suggested, and the means available to make these models financially sustainable. The energy-efficiency component of housing will also be a future priority as a way of reducing poverty across the region. It was proposed that a second housing forum be held in two years. More information on this event is available at: <http://www.ecahousingforum.eu/>

## VIII. Workshop on “Cadastral and real estate registration systems: Economic information for real estate markets in the UNECE region”

50. The UNECE workshop on “Cadastral and real estate registration systems: Economic information for real estate markets in the UNECE region” was held in Rome on 5 and 6 May 2011. It was co-organized by the UNECE Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) and Agenzia del Territorio which hosted this event.

51. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, Palestine, Poland, the Netherlands, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

52. Representatives of Eurogeographics, Eurostat and UNECE Real Estate Markets Advisory Group were in attendance.

53. The main objective of the workshop was to analyze the potential of government and private initiatives to produce, manage and share economic knowledge on real estate based on different national experiences.

54. The opening session of the workshop addressed the importance of cadastral and real estate registration systems and their influence on the development of well functioning housing markets. Further to that, detailed information was provided on the land administration system in Italy. In the subsequent discussions, policymakers and professional experts from the UNECE region shared their experiences and insights on opportunities and challenges for improving the sector’s performance, and identified priority actions. These discussions were organized around the following themes: the importance of producing quality and detailed information to support real estate market efficiency and transparency; real estate markets monitoring and related knowledge tools; real estate valuation and taxation, geo-referencing of data collected from the real estate market. Speakers and participants agreed that the world economic crisis has provided new evidence that the real estate sector plays a significant role underpinning national economies in the UNECE region.

55. Main conclusions and recommendations

The participants in the workshop agreed on the following recommendations regarding the importance of developing effective cadastral and registration systems in order to provide useful tools for market actors in the real estate sector and society at large:

- (a) Accurate and detailed economic information about the real estate sector was recognized as a valuable tool to support the economic choices of government authorities, private investors and consumers, as well as for the professional training of experts in real estate markets. Transaction information should be based on micro- and macro-economic indicators in order to ensure efficiency and transparency of the real estate market. Sound information on land, land use and real estate markets along with public awareness were considered as important for privatization processes;
- (b) Availability of suitable legal, institutional and technical frameworks was considered a prerequisite for improving the transparency of real estate markets. Suitable legislation would help to improve the reliability of

property valuation processes as well as to promote homogeneous data collection;

- (c) Producing property index price information could help to improve the quality of property portfolio revaluation services, ensure the implementation of automated property valuation models (also for fiscal purposes) and allow the development of surveyor auditing tools and mortgage arrears forecasting;
- (d) Administration services should be effective and customer oriented and institutions should be prepared to deal with the increased number of registration requests;
- (e) An integrated and holistic approach was recommended for the development of the real estate economy both at national and international levels. Public-private partnerships were considered as an important element for ensuring the good functioning of the real estate markets. In this context, the principles and guidelines contained in the UNECE Policy Framework for Sustainable Real Estate Markets were recognized as relevant and useful for developing a solid real estate sector.

56. Discussions at the workshop also demonstrated that the activities of the WPLA have addressed some of the most important challenges in the UNECE region through promoting successful reforms in land administration, security of tenure, transparency in land and real estate transactions as well as assisting member States in developing unified real property registration systems and computerized forms of land registration and real property records. The workshop also highlighted some challenges that could be addressed by the Working Party in the future, such as transparency of property valuation and taxation, sustainable financing, monitoring of the real estate market and land administration, e-land administration and 3D cadastral systems. More information on this workshop is available at: <http://www.agenziaterritorio.it/?id=8020>

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