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Committee on Housing and Land Management

Seventy-second session

Geneva, 3 - 4 October 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Affordable, healthy and ecological housing

High-level meeting under the auspices of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The sixty-fourth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, held in March 2011, invited the Committee on Housing and Land Management to discuss the possibility of organizing a Ministerial meeting to assess progress in the implementation of UNECE housing instruments and to define future policy directions for the Committee's work.

In order to support the discussion on this issue, the present note provides a brief summary of the Committee's focus and work since the last Ministerial meeting held in 2006. The note also identifies some emerging issues of interest to member States in the area of housing and land management which could be tackled in the coming years through the Ministerial meeting and through this Committee's programme of work.

1. The sixty-fourth session of UNECE (March 2011) invited the Committee on Housing and Land Management, after its annual session in October 2011, to report to the Executive Committee on the possibility of holding a Ministerial meeting to assess progress in the implementation of ECE housing instruments and to define future policy directions for the Committee's work.
2. The most recent Ministerial meeting under the auspices of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management was held in 2006. The Ministerial meeting adopted the Declaration on Economic and Social Challenges in Distressed Areas in the UNECE Region. To assess progress in the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, the Ministers decided to convene the next high-level meeting in five years' time.
3. The 2006 Ministerial meeting reconfirmed that the goals and challenges contained in the ECE Strategy for Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century (2000) would continue to serve as the basis for future programmes of work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management. Effective urban planning and management, the promotion of integrated urban renewal programmes, the refurbishment and management of the multifamily housing stock, and better access to affordable and adequate housing, infrastructure, facilities and public spaces were also highlighted as priorities for the UNECE region that should be addressed through the Committee's work.
4. Following the 2006 Ministerial meeting, the Committee on Housing and Land Management has streamlined its work to better respond to the needs in the housing and land administration sectors in the UNECE region. Over the last 5 years, its programme of work has addressed the following key areas:
 - Housing strategies, institutional and financial frameworks;
 - Improvement of urban environmental performance;
 - Land registration and land markets;
 - Housing modernization and management;
 - Energy efficiency in housing.
5. Support provided by the Committee to member States in these areas is focused on:
 - Strengthening national capacities for housing-related policy formulation and implementation through the preparation of country profile studies and land administration reviews;
 - Offering best practice experience and problem-oriented advice through the development of policy guidelines and recommendations on such issues as social housing and housing finance systems, condominium management, multifamily housing, informal settlements, land administration systems, real estate markets, and energy efficiency in housing; and
 - Improving the knowledge and capacity of national policy makers and experts through the organization of capacity-building workshops and training courses.
6. The work of the Committee in recent years has highlighted the fact that even major housing challenges do not appear high on the political agenda both at national and international levels. It became particularly evident, before the recent economic and financial crisis, that housing had lost its priority compared with other sectors, such as education and health. However, the crisis highlighted the potential of housing to act as a catalyst for economic development. One of the lessons learned from the crisis was that public investments in the housing sector and infrastructure development are crucial for stimulating economic recovery and demand in all sectors of economy.

7. In addition to insufficient political recognition of the role of housing, a number of housing issues and developments have either been highlighted or emerged in the UNECE region in recent years. These include but are not limited to the following:

- The lack of sustainable housing policies and legislation, and weak institutional frameworks governing the housing sector in countries with economies in transition;
- The resurging role of the public sector in facilitating sustainable housing development, particularly in the post-crisis period;
- The lack of affordable housing, with direct consequences reflected in phenomena such as informal settlements;
- Current demographic trends and their (potential) effect on housing affordability and accessibility, particularly in urban areas;
- Climate neutral and energy inefficient housing, as well as environmentally unsound and unsafe housing; and
- Insufficient transparency and soundness of real estate markets.

8. Keeping as a reference the goals of the Strategy and provisions of the Ministerial Declaration, as well as emerging issues of interest to member States, the Committee at its seventy-second session may wish to:

- Discuss the issue of organising a Ministerial meeting to review progress in the implementation of the Strategy and Ministerial Declaration and define future policy directions of the UNECE work in the areas of housing and land management;
 - Agree to hold a Ministerial meeting back to back with the seventy-fourth session of the Committee in September 2013;
 - Invite member States to consider hosting that Ministerial meeting and Committee session;
 - Invite the secretariat to prepare a draft indicative programme of the Ministerial meeting to be considered at the next session of the Committee.
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