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Review of the implementation of the programme of work 2016-2017
Sustainable urban development

Recommendations for capacity-building activities on urban planning in countries with transition economies in the ECE region

Note by the secretariat

Summary
The document provides an overview of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management activities on urban planning implemented so far, and recommendations for future activities on capacity-building.

The proposed activities will support the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing and the UNECE Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region for the Period 2014-2020.

The Committee is invited to endorse the proposal.
I. Introduction

1. The Committee, at its seventy-fifth session in 2014, endorsed a proposal for the development of a policy brief on spatial planning (ECE/HBP/2014/6). In 2015, UN-Habitat developed International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, which were approved by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat in Resolution 25/6 of 23 April 2015. The Resolution calls upon “international financial institutions, development agencies, [and UN-Habitat] to assist interested member States in using and adapting the Guidelines to their territorial and national contexts, where appropriate, and further developing tools and monitoring indicators”.

2. The International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning1 is a comprehensive document which provides national governments, local authorities, civil society organizations and planning professionals with a global reference framework that promotes more compact, socially inclusive, better-integrated and connected cities and territories that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change. They are a valuable resource for decision makers and urban professionals when reviewing urban and territorial planning systems. They were elaborated based on the analysis of 26 carefully selected successful examples of how urban and territorial planning can reshape countries and regions towards more sustainable development. These examples are included in the Compendium of Inspiring Practices, which is being prepared to support and illustrate the Guidelines. A draft learning and training package and a Handbook are being also developed, which will support the implementation of the Guidelines. With the publication of the comprehensive Guidelines and the preparation of its training materials, there is no need to prepare a separate UNECE policy brief on spatial planning.

3. According to the survey of member States, “Challenges and Priorities in Housing and Land Management in the UNECE Region”2, conducted by the secretariat of the Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) in 2013, there is a need for advisory services and capacity-building activities in urban planning at national and local level, especially in countries with transition economies.

4. The need for capacity-building activities in urban planning in the ECE region was also emphasized in the Habitat III “Report on Housing and Urban Development for the UNECE Region - Towards a City-focused, People-centred and Integrated Approach to the New Urban Agenda”3, which was elaborated by the UNECE and UN-Habitat, jointly with other partner international organizations and various stakeholders. The Report highlighted that urban sprawl remains a key phenomenon in the region, and indicates a need for stronger urban governance. Cities are struggling to address issues of demographic change, including ageing, migration, security, and overcoming multiple economic, financial and social problems. To address these challenges, the Report recommended promoting capacity-building of local authorities for managing cities, supporting the cooperation between cities and national governments and the private sector, and further developing intersectoral collaboration among different departments of city governments.

5. In April 2016, the UNECE and UN-Habitat organized a joint workshop in Minsk to discuss adapting the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning to the context of countries with economies in transition in the ECE region. The workshop recommendations included a proposal to elaborate a joint UNECE-UN-Habitat programme on capacity-building for urban planners in countries with transition economies in the ECE

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1 http://unhabitat.org/books/international-guidelines-on-urban-and-territorial-planning/
2 http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32606
3 http://www.unece.org/housing/habitat3regionalreport.html
region, based on the Guidelines. Such a programme should build on the studies, publications and other relevant activities of the UNECE and UN-Habitat as well as of other organizations, international programmes and projects. It would also allow the use of the Guidelines and associated tools (e.g., the Handbook) to review and assess the planning systems, and support planning reforms in the ECE region.

6. Information on UNECE activities on urban planning, and recommendations for the programme on capacity-building, are presented below.

II. UNECE activities on sustainable urban development

7. The CHLM works to improve the housing, urban and land governance through the promotion of the evidence-based formulation and implementation of sustainable population and social cohesion policies in the region and strengthening the formulation and implementation of policies, enhancing social cohesion and developing capacities at the national and local levels (A/69/6 (Prog.17) Corr.1). The Committee has produced a number of studies on urban development, adopted policy documents, and organized national and regional events to support capacity-building on urban planning, especially in countries with transition economies.

8. The following studies and reports were prepared by the Committee:

(a) “Spatial Planning: Key Instrument for Development and Effective Governance” (ECE/HBP/146)\(^4\), which provides guidance on how to improve the functioning of spatial planning systems in UNECE member States, particularly in countries with transition economies, with a focus on enabling all actors in the public, private and community sectors to work together to promote the sustainable development of human settlements;

(b) “Climate Neutral Cities (ECE/HBP/168)”\(^5\), which discusses the importance of cities in energy reduction, climate protection and climate adaptation, and offers a comprehensive list of actions that cities in the region need to undertake in order to mitigate their energy intensity and carbon footprint, transition to post-carbon energy, and reduce their vulnerability to climate change;

(c) “Country profiles on housing and land management”, which contain analyses of housing, urban development, land management, and policies at country level, and formulate recommendations to governments for the improvement of these sectors\(^6\);

(d) A publication containing short national reports on housing and urban development “Challenges and priorities in housing and urban development in the UNECE region”\(^7\);

(e) The UN-Habitat and UNECE joint report “CIS Cities: Towards Sustainable Future - The Commonwealth of Independent States Regional Report”\(^8\).

9. The 2013 Ministerial Meeting on Housing and Land Management\(^9\) adopted the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region for the Period

\(^4\) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/spatial_planning_e.pdf
\(^5\) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/climate.neutral.cities_e.pdf
\(^7\) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/sessions/docs2015/informal_notes/3bA_Mini_CPs_publication.pdf
\(^8\) http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42438
\(^9\) http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32586
2014-2020 (ECE/HBP/2013/3),\textsuperscript{10} which guides the work of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies.\textsuperscript{11} The Strategy aims at promoting sustainable housing and land management in the region by balancing the competing demand for and limited supply of available land, minimizing the loss of rural land and increasing the efficient use of urban land. It establishes, inter alia, the following two targets for urban planning and development to be achieved by member States by the year 2020:

- To develop national strategic directions and policies for sustainable spatial development with the participation of all stakeholders;
- To develop territorial plans and/or other instruments to enforce existing regulations at least for the following: areas prone to natural and human-generated disasters; attractive areas for private investments; ecologically sensitive areas and heritage sites; inner-city densification, urban regeneration, mixed-use development, and re-use or redevelopment of blight areas and brownfield sites.

10. In April 2015, the UNECE endorsed the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, a non-legally binding document that aims to support member States as they seek to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all.\textsuperscript{12} The Charter outlines the following actions for governments to take to support sustainable development:

- Adopt green housing policies and integrate them into sustainable urban and territorial development policies;
- Promote and monitor integrated urban development and regeneration that brings workplaces and services into closer spatial relation to housing, while taking into account potential dangers and hazards, and increase resilience to climate change;
- Promote the use of spatial, cadastral and land registration information and services to create an environment conducive to investment in housing and the security of land and housing tenure;
- Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, particularly for disadvantaged population groups;
- Support cities and human settlements in adopting and implementing smart city concepts, integrated policies and plans to support: inclusion, including socially mixed communities; resource efficiency; and resilience to climate change and disasters;
- Promote integrated spatial planning which supports: the efficient spatial distribution of economic activities; the improvement of technical and social infrastructure; urban regeneration and integrated urban renewal, affordable housing; and addressing urban sprawl;
- Support good governance at all levels, cooperation between relevant government agencies within countries, effective public participation in decision-making, and the rule of law in housing;
- Develop and implement capacity-building programmes on housing, urban planning and land management issues for all stakeholders;
- Intensify the regional and international exchange of experience and cooperation in housing, urban planning and land management.

\textsuperscript{10} http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35252
\textsuperscript{12} http://www.unece.org/housing/charter.html
11. During 2015-2016, the UNECE also coordinated the preparation of the Habitat III “Report on Housing and Urban Development for the UNECE Region - Towards a City-focused, People-centred and Integrated Approach to the New Urban Agenda”, which was part of the preparatory process towards Habitat III – the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. The Report was prepared under the supervision of the Habitat III Secretariat, in cooperation with regional offices of UN-Habitat, and through regular consultations with representatives of other UN agencies, international organizations, and academia, as well as other UNECE divisions. The process of the preparation of the Report included teleconferences with the Habitat III Secretariat and the organization of three expert group meetings. The draft Report was presented and discussed at the Committee’s seventy-sixth session in December 2015. It documented key trends in housing and urban development in the region over the last 20 years.

12. The UNECE organizes, on a regular basis, workshops at national and regional level to promote the capacity-building of national and local authorities in countries with transition economies. This includes national workshops held within the UNECE/UN-Habitat UNDA project “Strengthening national capacities for sustainable housing and urban development in countries with economies in transition”.

13. The Committee secretariat organized, in Geneva on 13 April 2016, jointly with the secretariats of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) and of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the European Investment Bank, a regional workshop on land-use planning and hazardous wastes. “Draft guidance on land-use planning, the siting of hazardous activities and related safety aspects” (ECE/CP.TEIA/WG.1/2016/INF.2), which was elaborated by the Working Group on Development under the Industrial Accidents Convention, was presented and discussed at the workshop.

14. UN-Habitat, the UNECE and the Ministry of Architecture and Construction of the Republic of Belarus organized a joint workshop in Minsk on 18-19 April 2016 to discuss adapting the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning to the context of countries with economies in transition in the ECE region. The workshop brought together international urban planning experts, and representatives from UN agencies, national and local governments, and research institutions from Belarus and other CIS countries. The workshop organization was supported by UN-Habitat and the UNECE Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation.

15. Another example of cooperation between the UNECE and UN-Habitat is the organization of a joint session on smart sustainable cities as part of the “Reviewing the State of Safety in World Cities: Safer Cities +20” conference, which will take place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 6-8 July 2016. The conference is co-organized by UN-Habitat and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, in cooperation with the UNECE, and with logistical assistance from the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) within the UN-Habitat “Safer Cities” Programme, which promotes “a holistic, integrated, multi-level government and multi-sectoral approach to improving the liveability of cities and quality of life for all urban residents, predicated on the confidence that good urban governance, planning and management can improve the safety of neighbourhoods”.

13 http://www.unece.org/housing/unda.html
14 http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42475#/ 
15 http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42615#/ 
17 http://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/safer-cities/
III. Recommendations for capacity-building activities in urban planning

16. The proposed programme on capacity-building in urban planning will:

• Promote key principles of sustainable urban development as outlined in key UN global documents, including the Rio+20 outcome document; the UN Secretary General’s Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) Global Action Agenda; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and especially the Sustainable Development Goal 11 of making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030; the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; and the Draft New Urban Agenda. The programme will therefore emphasize cross-sectoral linkages, including those related to environmental quality (outdoor and indoor), climate change, natural and human-made disaster risks, transport, ageing, and other topics;

• Support the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing; the UNECE Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region for the Period 2014-2020; and the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning;

• Promote the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning principles in UNECE countries, particularly in those in transition;

• Coordinate closely with, and build on, relevant work of UN-Habitat; other UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR); other international organizations, including the European Commission and its Joint Research Centre, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), the World Bank, and the United Cities and Local Governments; and other stakeholders;

• When feasible, cooperate with other UNECE divisions, including Environment; Sustainable Energy; Transport; and Economic Cooperation and Trade.

17. The range of the proposed activities includes:

• Active dissemination of information on the UNECE, UN-Habitat and other partner organizations’ work on urban planning, through the preparation of new publications, the translation of existing ones into national languages, mass media, and the organization of national and local events;

• Capacity-building at international, national and local levels (organization of training, peer-to-peer learning exchange visits, implementation of pilot projects, etc.);

• Networking, including with national governments, cities, regions and other stakeholders; and establishment of the regional community to practice peer-to-peer learning and sharing;

• Studies to review the implementation of sustainable urban development policies at national and local levels;

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• The collection and exchange of information on best practices in urban planning;
• Cooperation on the establishment of a network of Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing Centres as joint centres for capacity-building on sustainable housing and urban development. The approach to the establishment of the Centres is described in ECE/HBP/2016/2.

18. The Committee is invited to discuss, provide inputs and endorse this proposal.