

Economic Commission for Europe
Committee on Housing and Land Management

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Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda

Review of the programme of work 2012 – 2013

Country profiles on the Housing Sector

**Outline of a study to review the structure and
methodology for preparation of UNECE Country
Profiles on the Housing Sector**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The production of UNECE Country Profiles on the Housing Sector (CPs) is a flagship activity of the Committee on Housing and Land Management. The preparation methodology, the relevance to target groups in the UNECE countries and the structure of the CPs require regular review and updates to reflect the changing social, economic and political context in the UNECE region.

This note contains information on earlier reviews of the structure, methodology and preparation of UNECE CPs as well as proposals for the next review of the CPs structure and preparation methodology.

The first UNECE CPs were issued in 1996. Reviews of the methodology, structure and preparation were conducted by the Committee in 2003 and 2006. At its meeting in April 2012, the Bureau of the Committee discussed the need to review again the methodology and the structure to make the CPs even more efficient and practical.

The Committee is invited to comment on the proposal for the review to be conducted. Following the Committee's discussion and endorsement, the study will be completed and presented at the seventy-fourth session of the Committee.

I. Introduction

1. To support housing policy reforms in the UNECE region, and especially in countries in transition, the UNECE prepares Country Profiles on the Housing Sector (CPs). The main objective of these studies is to improve the housing and land management systems of the countries under review through the assessment of countries' housing and land management policies and systems and the development of country-specific recommendations. CPs are undertaken upon the request of member States.

II. Country Profiles as a tool to promote reforms in housing and land management

2. CPs provide a tool to promote reforms in housing and land management. They help Governments to analyse their housing policies, strategies, institutional and financial frameworks for the housing sector and to compare their progress with that of other countries.

3. CPs are carried out in the context of the Committee's six strategic pillars¹:

- Promoting good governance,
- Improving urban environmental performance,
- Strengthening social cohesion and security in cities,
- Promoting public and private investment in housing,
- Improving land markets and
- Raising gender awareness.

4. The CP is a process-oriented exercise. At its core is an analytical study on the housing sector, drafted by independent international experts. It is prepared using data and publications provided by both national Governments and international experts. Recommendations for improving policies and practices are an essential part of the programme. It also aims to provide information to potential investors.

5. A large number of national and local stakeholders in the target country are involved in preparing a CP. This promotes a better exchange of information and experiences as well as better coordination of activities between these different stakeholders (such as ministries of housing, energy and finance, among others, academia, NGOs and the private sector).

6. A CP is a report which contains comprehensive information on housing and land management. CPs are a good source of information for investors, donor agencies and other national and international organizations.

7. UNECE CPs were prepared and published for Bulgaria (1996), Poland (1998), Slovakia (1999), Lithuania (2000), Romania (2001), the Republic of Moldova (2002), Albania (2002), Armenia (2004), the Russian Federation (2004), Serbia and Montenegro (2006), Georgia (2007), Belarus (2008), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Azerbaijan (2010) and Tajikistan (2011). The preparation of a CP for Ukraine is under way.

8. Each CP includes more than 20 country-specific policy recommendations. Governments use them to guide the work of national policymakers for years to

¹ UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century (available at <http://www.unece.org/hlm/welcome.html>)

come. Examples² below illustrate how CP recommendations helped the countries to promote their policy reforms:

- As a result of the 2002 CP on Albania, working groups were established to develop proposals for new housing legislation on access to affordable housing and housing management, which were approved respectively in 2004 and 2009. In 2008, a pilot project for 1,000 social housing units was initiated as per CP recommendations.
- In Armenia, following the completion of the CP, a State programme on housing for special population groups was developed and a concept to improve housing conditions of the socially vulnerable was approved. Moreover, the Government initiated a five-year programme on multifamily housing stock maintenance and management.
- Since the launch of the CP on Azerbaijan in 2010, the Government amended the Housing Code and drafted a Town Planning Code.
- In Belarus, recommendations from the 2008 CP were translated into national legislation to make housing more affordable through savings schemes and to facilitate easier access to mortgages and low-interest credits. This includes a draft law on housing construction savings. Moreover, a programme for the design and construction of energy-efficient housing was launched and a pilot project to introduce rental housing in Belarus was started in Minsk.
- Following the preparation of the CP on Georgia, the Government of Georgia developed a draft Codex for Spatial Planning and Construction Regulation. This included, for example, rules to legalize existing illegal buildings.
- In Serbia, the 2006 CP has served as a basis for substantive improvements in housing legislation. One important achievement was a legal framework for social housing.

III. Evolution of the methodology

(a) Review conducted by the Committee Bureau in 2003

9. The CPs developed until 2004 (for Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Albania and Armenia) were drafted with the same standard, which included six chapters:

- Chapter I: Framework for the housing sector transition
- Chapter II: Existing housing stock and new construction
- Chapter III: Institutional framework
- Chapter IV: Legal framework
- Chapter V: Financial framework
- Conclusions and recommendations

This was a rather rigid structure; it did not allow the CP to reflect the specific situations in individual member States.

10. For the preparation of the CP, an international team was established. The team met only once, when the field mission was planned.

11. The review of CP methodology conducted by the CHLM Bureau in 2003³ proposed the following primary changes to the CPs' approach and methodology:

² The examples are based on the outcomes of a study on the impact of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management work to improve policies in housing and land management. The study was conducted by the Committee Secretariat in 2011.

- To consider shifting the weight of the study away from descriptions and facts to evaluations and policy recommendations. This would mean keeping descriptive sections to a minimum of around ten pages while sections with conclusions and recommendations would be strengthened and structurally reorganized.
- To explore the possibility of better adapting the structure of the study to the needs of the requesting country. For example, in countries where a coherent housing strategy already exists and where the overall development of the housing sector is rather advanced the study might focus on a few specific issues. In these cases, the requesting country would define the problem areas where assistance would be needed. This would result in a study which would provide not an assessment of a country's housing situation in general, but rather an evaluation of specific problem areas identified by the country.
- To consider the option of having the expert team meeting once again after the research mission, in order to enhance the process of peer review and therefore quality control. Such a workshop could be considered as a first step towards disseminating the conclusions reached in the study.

12. The Bureau recommendations from 2003 were implemented by the Secretariat in the preparation of the CP of the Russian Federation in 2004. The following changes were made to the methodology and the approach to the preparation of CPs:

- The descriptive part of the study was minimized, separating the study into a comparatively short descriptive part and a thematic part. The thematic part analysed specific housing themes based on the facts laid out in the descriptive part.
- The procedure for the study was modified to adopt the study more strongly to the needs of the requesting country. Field research in the Russian Federation took place not only in the capital but also in three other, selected regions.
- After the research mission, a CP launch event was organized in which all experts participated and discussed the chapter drafts.
- A greater effort was made to analyse specific housing and land management priority issues from various perspectives, including legal, institutional and financial perspectives.

(b) Methodology review of 2006

13. A review of CP methodology was again conducted in 2006 in connection with preparation of the CP for Georgia (see ECE/HBP/2006/9). This review was another step to make CPs more practical so that the CPs could support policy-makers in their efforts to promote policy reforms in the housing sector and in land management. The 2006 review put a stronger emphasis on the analysis and policy recommendations, the increased consideration of country specific issues, and the systematic involvement of stakeholders and decision-makers in the implementation of policy recommendations.

(c) Self-evaluation of the country profiles of 2006 to 2007

14. The purpose of the 2006 to 2007 self-evaluation was to analyse the preparation of the CPs in order to streamline the preparation process, to improve cooperation between the partners involved, and to minimize delays. The self-evaluation did not analyse the content or methodology of the CPs.

15. It is planned that the preparation of a CP take 35 weeks from the official request of the member country to the publication and dissemination of the report, which means that in two years three CPs could be started and finished. However, the 2006

³ Please see Memo to the Bureau members of the Committee on Human Settlements on the experience with the new conceptual approach for the CP Russia, January 2004

to 2007 evaluation showed that there were delays in some steps of the process which could extend the time to completion by up to six months, resulting in decreased efficiency and a waiting list for CP preparation. Recommendations of the evaluation focused on reducing these delays.

VI. Proposals for the next review of the Country Profiles' methodology and structure

16. At its meeting in April 2012, the Bureau of the Committee discussed the need to review the methodology of the CPs once more to make them even more efficient and practical. It was proposed that sections on Green Economy and on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction be added to future CPs.

17. It was also proposed that following the completion and publication of the CPs, National Action Plans to implement the CPs' recommendations be prepared. It was suggested that Governments of the countries for which CPs were prepared, establish high-level national intersectoral Steering Committees to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the CP recommendations. When possible, model technical projects should be implemented to support the Governments in implementing policy recommendations.

18. At the World Urban Forum, which took place in Naples, Italy, from 1 to 7 September 2012, the Committee Bureau and Secretariat organized a networking event "Housing Agendas in Transition: UNECE Country Profiles and Their Impact on Housing Policies in Countries in Transition" where the UNECE CP methodology was discussed. Participants stressed the importance of regularly monitoring the implementation of the CP recommendations. It was proposed that such monitoring be organized after five to seven years after the CPs are completed. Participants also considered important the coordination of donor activities to implement CP recommendations.

19. In August 2012, the Institute for Urban Economics in Moscow was contracted to conduct an analysis of the CP structure and preparation methodology. In the period until July 2013, the contractor will conduct an evaluation of the CP structure and methodology through interviews by telephone or in person with the CPs' end users (representatives of the governments, international organizations and municipalities) in several UNECE countries.

20. Information from the interviews will be complemented by research to analyse the structure of published CPs and of studies of countries' housing and land management which were developed by other organizations, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UN-Habitat. Based on this analysis, an evaluation of CPs and suggested guidelines for the preparation of the CPs will be prepared. The study should also build on the outcomes and recommendations of the 2003, 2006 and 2006 to 2007 CP reviews.

21. The report and the guidelines will be presented to the seventy-fourth Committee session.