Summary

As part of the UNDA 10th tranche project, UNECE in collaboration with UN-Habitat is implementing the project “Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition”. Funds have been provided by the United Nations Development Account for the period January 2016 to December 2019. The direct beneficiary countries are: Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

One of the key outputs of the project, the “Guidelines for evidence-based policies for urban development with focus on housing”, is being developed in collaboration with UN-Habitat. The Guidelines will focus on data collection, analysis tools and methodologies to support national evidence-based housing and urban development policies in the UNECE region.

This note reports the progress on the preparation of the guidelines.

The Committee is invited to take note of the information provided.
Background

Since January 2016, UNECE in collaboration with UN-Habitat, is implementing the project “Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition”. Funds have been provided by the United Nations Development Account for the period January 2016 to December 2019. The direct beneficiary countries are: Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

The aim of the project is to strengthen national capacities for the development of evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development. The project will assist national governments by: a) elaborating a policy paper and guidelines for the collection and analysis of data and information on housing; b) providing advice on the development of evidence-based policies; and c) promoting intersectoral cooperation and building capacity on sustainable housing through the provision of advisory services, training materials, organization of workshops and online trainings.

One of the key outputs of the project, the “Guidelines for evidence-based policies for urban development with focus on housing”, is being developed in collaboration with UN-Habitat. The Guidelines will focus on data collection, analysis tools and methodologies to support national evidence-based housing policies for sustainable urban development in the UNECE region.

These guidelines will provide guidance for policymakers in urban development, taking into account key regulatory frameworks at the international and national levels, information on the data needed to support the sustainable cities and human settlements, and advising on how to use this data to prepare evidence-based policies drawing upon examples of best practices internationally.

The importance of evidence-based housing and urban development policies

Policymaking which is ‘typically concerned with setting priorities and allocating resources’ is inherently political since it involves choices and trade-offs between options containing multiple and competing sets of social values. Although this means that policy-making is usually normatively charged, a strong case can nonetheless be made in favor of the possibility of evidence-based policy-making, where ‘policy decisions are expected to follow from rigorous and accurate uses of scientific evidence’.

Ultimately, policies need to be knowledge-based. These guidelines will focus mostly on how evidence must be gathered, interpreted and transcribed in order for policy makers to make informed decisions about the current and future challenges they face in the sphere of housing and urban development.
Additionally, there is a feedback loop that can be incorporated in the data collection process given that certain methods such as cost-benefit analysis and impact evaluation inform pre- and post-programme impact disaggregating the effects of the programme from other factors. A wide variety of information sources will be considered ranging from national statistics and household surveys to geospatial information, as well as sources such as micro-data which the OECD defines as ‘an observation data collected on an individual object – statistical unit’.

Finally, the guidelines constitute a practical tool to help policy-makers at national, regional and local levels, to design and revise sustainable housing and urban development policies. Underlaying premise of the guidelines is that evidence plays important role in setting priorities and allocating resources in the context of housing and urban development policies.

Contribution to SDGs

Monitoring progress toward the SDGs will require a joint effort to collect and report accurate and timely data. This effort will need to be shared by governments and a broad range of actors from private sector to civil society and coordinated closely.

The Guidelines for evidence-based policies for urban development with focus on housing will support beneficiary countries directly, as well as the whole UNECE in the achievement the Sustainable Development Goal 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and most precisely the target 11.1 “by 2030, to provide access for all to adequate safe and affordable housing”.

Brief description of chapters

The Guidelines will consist of seven chapters.

- Chapter One will present an overview of housing and urban development trends and dynamics in the UNECE region with respect to housing supply and quality, social inclusion and urban development and sustainable use of land and information on the project within which the Guidelines were developed.
- Chapter Two will describe a methodology used in the Guidelines.
- Chapter Three ‘Housing, Urban Planning and Land Management in Albania, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine’ will explore in detail the contexts in which housing policies in Albania, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine are created. In particular, it will reflect on the social, economic and geographical dynamics that affect the formulation and implementation of housing policies in those countries. As the Guidelines document is concerned with the role of data in evidence-based policy-making, the chapter will provide an overview of selected housing policy frameworks, data collection methodologies and tools used for sustainable housing and urban development. It will conclude with a reflection of housing data needs in Albania, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine.
- Chapter Four will present a variety of existing international policy frameworks, methodologies and tools that help decision-makers to better organize, manage and use data for sustainable housing and urban development policies. The chapter will describe the UN SDG framework and indicator set and the EU SDG indicator set. The description will be complemented with the references to other EU policy (monitoring) frameworks, description of methodologies and tools that enable efficient data collection and processing at international level.
- Chapter Five, ‘Data Gathering process to achieve SDG 11 at national Level’, will describe the data and information needed to create coherent policies for sustainable housing and urban development. The chapter will then proceed to outline commonly used types of housing data (including various dimensions of housing data) and the rationale for its use; as well as new data types and data sources. It will also reflect on the roles of ‘Housing and Population Census’, ‘Household Surveys’ in policy-
making for sustainable housing and urban development, and the potential of big data and geospatial
information to provide additional insights into housing and urban development dynamics. The
chapter will finish with a reflection on the role of private sector organizations, via international and
intersectoral partnerships, academic institutions and technical and planning institutes in data
production and management.

• Chapter Six ‘From data collection to policy decisions’ will outline a variety of means for ensuring
effective and efficient use of evidence and data in policy-making. While reflecting on selected
elements of policy process, the chapter will touch upon such issues as: the difference between
evidence- and value-based policies, how to frame housing objectives, how to weight the evidence,
the importance of information literacy, data visualization, and others.

• The document will conclude with Chapter Seven which will include conclusions and a ‘Checklist
for data on Housing, Urban Development and Land Management’, which is meant to serve as a
reference point for decision-makers aiming to create more reflexive and evidence-grounded policies
for sustainable housing and urban development.

The Guidelines are expected to be finalized in 2018. The finalized Guidelines will be presented to the
attention of the Committee on Housing and Land Management at its Eightieth session.