
Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management****Eightieth session**

Geneva, 2-4 October 2019

Item 2(b) of the provisional agenda

Review of the implementation of the programme of work 2018-2019**Sustainable housing and real estate markets****Proposal for a study on “Improving Housing Affordability in the UNECE region”****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

At its 79th session (7-8 October 2018), the UNECE Committee reviewed the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing in the UNECE region. The Committee requested the secretariat to conduct a survey to identify the needs and priorities for capacity-building and other activities to support further implementation of the Charter (ECE/HBP/194). The survey is planned to be conducted in 2019-2020. This information document contains a proposal for a study on housing affordability which will build on the survey.

It is proposed that the study on housing affordability will cover the four principles of sustainable housing, as outlined in the Charter: (a) Environmental protection; (b) Economic effectiveness; (c) Social inclusion and participation; and (d) Cultural adequacy. It is also proposed that the study builds on the implementation of the 10th UNDA project ‘Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition’, which focuses on approaches to (i) data production/collection; (ii) development of evidence; and (iii) decision-making in relation to sustainable housing and urban development policies in the UNECE countries. The project highlighted a need to ensure availability of evidence on housing affordability policies and regularly review their implementation.

The Committee is invited to take note of the information and agree on next steps, in line with agenda item 2(b) on the review of implementation of the programme of work 2018-2019.

I. Introduction

1. As expressed in the UN Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing, housing plays a key role in improving the quality of human life. Poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable populations may lack affordable and adequate housing, face unhealthy and unsafe housing and physical barriers, and/or related discrimination and exclusion. Moreover, houses and human settlements need to become resilient to extreme weather events, including those caused by climate change.
2. As a result of the 2008 financial and economic crisis, some countries have experienced economic imbalances, increase of homelessness and decrease of access to decent quality, affordable housing. The crisis also underscored the vital role housing markets play in the economy and highlighted the pressing need of improving access to decent quality affordable housing in the UNECE countries.
3. Improving housing affordability is currently one of the most important and complex policy challenges. Developing strategies to address this challenge requires identification of causes that lead to decrease of access to decent quality, affordable housing, and formulation of comprehensive and coherent policy responses at all levels. Although housing is without any doubt high on political agenda, various meanings can be attributed to the term ‘housing affordability’ within and across UNECE countries. At the same time, improving affordability should go hand in hand with improving quality of life and sustainability, e.g. in relation to environmental protection; social inclusion and participation; and culture, as defined in the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing.
4. The UNDA 10th tranche project “Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition” implemented by UNECE and UN-Habitat, which focuses on policy approaches to (i) production/collection of; (ii) development of evidence; and (iii) decision-making, for sustainable housing and urban development policies, revealed a need to further support evidence-based policy-making on sustainable housing and urban development specifically in relation to housing affordability. Building on the experience of implementation of the above project and taking into account the need to further implement principles of sustainable housing as contained in the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the UNECE secretariat elaborated the following proposal for a study on ‘Improving Housing Affordability in the UNECE region’.
5. The study will build on a survey of member States on the needs and priorities for capacity-building and other activities in relation to housing affordability (ECE/HBP/194), as agreed by the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its 79th session in October 2018.

II. Aim and objectives

1. The aim of the study is to improve capacities of national and local governments in developing policies to improve housing affordability and housing sustainability in the UNECE Region.
2. The study objectives are:
 - i. To identify housing affordability challenges in countries in the UNECE region

- ii. To identify existing policy instruments for improving affordability of sustainable housing in the UNECE countries
 - iii. To showcase ‘good practices’ in relation to the abovementioned policy instruments and to support their dissemination.
3. The study will be based on the following four principles and related rationales that form the basis of sustainable housing: (a) Environmental protection; (b) Economic effectiveness; (c) Social inclusion and participation; and (d) Cultural adequacy; and will explore (among others) such issues as:
 - The role of governments in promoting housing affordability
 - Access to finance and funding
 - Access and availability of land for housing construction, and
 - Regulations to promote access to decent quality, affordable housing in the UNECE countries.
 4. The study will include (i) desk research that entails the review of documentary data on ‘housing affordability’ and ‘housing sustainability’; (ii) collection of primary data using the survey of UNECE member States; (3) preparation of a report on the study.
 5. It will build on outcomes and findings of past and ongoing studies and projects conducted by the UNECE and other organisations, including the UNECE Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management, the UNDA 10th tranche project “Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition”, the UN-Habitat SDG11 Synthesis Report on Cities and Communities, the Housing Europe Federation State of Housing Reports 2017, the OECD “Policies to promote access to good quality to promote affordable housing in OECD countries”; and others.
 6. By deriving good practices in improving housing affordability at local, national and international levels, the study will support the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing and other relevant arrangements.

III. Implementation of the study

8. The preparation of the study is subject to availability of extrabudgetary funding and will be carried out in cooperation with UN-Habitat, Housing Europe and other partners.
9. The study is planned to be conducted in 2019-2020 with the following proposed timeline
 - a. Review of documents and available data, preparation of the questionnaire – October-November 2019
 - b. Distribution of the questionnaire to national focal points and stakeholders – November 2019
 - c. Collection of responses – December 2019
 - d. Data analysis – December 2019 and January 2020

- e. Preparation of first draft – February 2020
- f. Feedback from partners – March 2020
- g. Preparation of the second draft – April 2020
- h. Presentation at the Second European Housing Leaders’ Summit, June 2020
- i. Approval of the final draft of the study outcomes – 81th session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, 7-9 October 2020
- j. Production of e-learning materials – June 2020 – December 2020
- k. Presentation of the preliminary results at the International Social Housing Festival in Helsinki, June 2021.
