Good health adds life to years – UNECE joins celebration of World Health Day on 7 April

World Health Day is celebrated every year on 7 April to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948. Each year it is dedicated to a different global health challenge (see: http://www.who.int/world-health-day/2012/en/index.html).

Gains in life expectancy have added many years to the lives of people around the world. The challenge is to enable people to live longer in good health, in dignity to enjoy the highest possible quality of life – in other words, to add life to years. The message of this year’s World Health Day therefore is that good health throughout the life-course helps to make the most of the positive aspects of ageing. It allows older men and women to lead full and productive lives and to be a resource for their families and communities.

The World Health Day campaign aims to engage all parts of society – from policy-makers and politicians to older people and youth – to create societies which appreciate and acknowledge older people's contributions.

The World Health Day on Ageing and Health coincides with the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (http://europa.eu/ey2012/) as well as with the second review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS). A UNECE Ministerial Conference Ensuring a society for all ages: promoting quality of life and active ageing on 19-20 September 2012, in Vienna, Austria, will mark the tenth anniversary of MIPAA/RIS adoption and take stock of progress made in implementing the international policy framework on ageing within the region. The Ministerial Conference will be preceded by civil society and research forums on 18 September 2012.

For more information, please visit: http://www.unece.org/pau/ageing/ministerial_conference_2012.html.

UNECE welcomes the adoption of the GHS by the United States of America

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of the Department of Labor of the United States of America has taken the first step towards the implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) with the publication of the revised Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) on the Federal Register on 26 March 2012.

The United States of America thus join some 43 countries around the world that have already implemented or are in the process of implementing the GHS, including: Australia, Brazil, China, the 27 member States of the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Singapore, Switzerland, Uruguay and Viet Nam. Other countries continue to revise and amend their legal texts, standards and guidelines to achieve implementation of the GHS as soon as possible.

"Exposure to hazardous chemicals is one of the most serious threats facing American workers today," said the Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. "Revising OSHA’s Hazard Communication standard will improve the quality and consistency of hazard information, making it safer for workers to do their jobs and easier for employers to stay competitive."

The GHS addresses classification of chemicals by types of hazards and proposes harmonized hazard communication elements. It aims at ensuring that information on chemical hazards be available in order to enhance the protection of human life and the environment during the handling, transport and use of these chemicals. The GHS also provides a basis for harmonization of rules and regulations on chemicals at national, regional and worldwide level and it has been designed to allow industry to self-classify its products.

The revised HCS will become effective on 25 May 2012 although it will not become mandatory until 1 June 2015.
OSHA estimates that the implementation of the GHS in the workplace will increase the safety of some 43 million workers potentially exposed to hazardous chemicals working in over 5 million workplaces in the United States. It is expected that this will result in savings of $475.2 million from productivity improvements for health and safety managers and logistics personnel, $32.2 million during periodic updating of SDSs and labels, and $285.3 million from simplified hazard communication training. The revised standard will also contribute to reduce trade barriers and result in productivity improvements for companies handling, storing, using and exporting chemicals.

The first edition of the GHS was adopted in December 2002 by the Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (SCGHS) and endorsed by the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals. Both the Committee and the Sub-Committee are subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to which the UNECE's Transport Division provides secretariat services.

For further information on the GHS and its status of implementation worldwide, please visit: http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html

Housing

UNECE to initiate work on the Country Profile on the Housing Sector in Ukraine

Ukraine faces major housing challenges, including poor energy efficiency and low affordability. Ukraine is also one of the most energy-intensive economies in the world. According to World Bank estimates, the energy consumption of Ukrainian buildings is around 250 – 275 Kilowatt hour per square meter (kWh/m²), which is at least double that of Western Europe's average of around 120 kWh/m². In spite of growing energy prices, the residential sector's energy consumption has not changed during the last 20 years.

Affordability is also a key concern. According to the International Housing Affordability Index, which looks at urban housing prices within the context of local wage rates, housing affordability in Kiev, capital of Ukraine (index value 6.0), is close to levels in the largest world megalopolises such as London (6.9) and New York (6.2) and is even higher than in Moscow, capital of the neighbouring Russian Federation (5.0). There is also a housing shortage in Ukraine compared to most European countries.

As a result, housing policy is high on Ukraine's government agenda. In 2011, the Government adopted a state programme for the construction of affordable housing for 2010–2017. There is good potential for the development and effective implementation of housing policies in Ukraine due to their relatively high level of human capital, a solid institutional framework for the housing policy; and a legal framework that is being regularly updated.

At the closing meeting of the research mission, Anatoly Bliznyuk the Minister of Regional Development, Construction and Municipal Economy, welcomed the Country Profile as an opportunity to receive an independent review of the housing situation and policy in Ukraine and called for a wider application of best international practices in the housing sector. He also expressed hope for continued cooperation with the UNECE beyond the work on the Country Profile, for example in the review of draft laws and strategic documents related to the housing sector.

For more information on the Country Profiles, please visit: http://www.unece.org/hlm/prgm/cph/welcome.html or contact Gulnara Roll at: gulnara.roll@unece.org.

The North American Forest Sector Outlook Study - 2006-2030

The United States and Canada have experienced large changes in their forest sectors over the past 50 years. The UNECE/FAO North American Forest Sector Outlook Study (NAFSOS) looks at these changes and projects possible futures for the forest sector in 2030. The study concludes that over the next decades North American forests are expected to meet increasing and sometimes conflicting environmental, social and economic demands: issues that warrant policymakers' attention.

Economic and demographic growth combine with technology changes lead to global losses in forest area but smaller losses in the volumes of standing timber inventory. The U.S. is projected to lose an average of about 0.2% of its forests each year mainly due to expansion of urban areas, while Canada is not projected to lose any forest. Stock levels (standing timber inventory volumes) are projected to increase in North America under all scenarios.

For further information on the GHS and its status of implementation worldwide, please visit: http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html