In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region, buildings are responsible for over one third of the total final energy consumption. Much of this energy is used by the residential sector (20–30 percent of total final consumption on average), i.e. mostly for space and water heating.

High prices for centrally-distributed energy have prompted many residents to switch to alternative and less efficient heating means such as coal or wood, increasing deprivation and environmental pollution. Also the housing sector currently maintains outdated inefficient practices, and is one of the drivers of high levels of energy consumption.

In many cities of the UNECE region buildings are still being constructed without meeting appropriate regulations, and the retrofitting of existing housing stock is lagging behind. Retrofitting existing housing stock and, in particular, multi-family housing, was identified as a priority challenge across the UNECE region in a survey of member States. Nevertheless, space heating and water heating are generally considered to be the areas where the opportunities for energy efficiency improvement and savings are the greatest.

The UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) provides policy advice and expert assistance on sustainable housing development, land administration, spatial planning and energy efficiency. Since its establishment in 1947, the Committee has actively promoted building codes and standards.

Our work is based on the principles of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing a non-legally binding document aims to support member States as they seek to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all.

The Committee works to improve housing energy efficiency and to facilitate the maintenance, management and refurbishment of existing housing stock. The Committee provides a framework for Governments to overcome barriers to energy efficiency investments in the residential sector.

Our policy recommendations focus on energy performance standards and technology integration. We embrace measures to ensure that new and existing residential buildings progressively meet higher technological standards with a goal to promote very low-energy and low-carbon technology.

Our study on Green Homes illustrates the multiple environmental, economic and social benefits arising from a transition towards energy-efficient housing. It outlines the required institutional changes and provides some basic principles for successful policies.

To assist member States in improving the sustainability of their housing sectors, the Committee on Housing and Land Management has developed a concrete, comprehensive and integrated UNECE Action Plan for energy-efficient housing. The Action Plan for energy efficiency measures in the residential sector makes concrete recommendations targeted to that country’s specific conditions.

The acute need in most transition economies to address problems in multi-family housing, the practices and initiatives are described in the Green Practices for Energy-efficient housing in the UNECE region predominantly targeting existing multi-family housing blocks.

Since 2011 the Committee has been organizing training workshops in different parts of the UNECE region to help countries set up the legal and financial institutional framework for more energy-efficient homes.

Visit our website www.unece.org/housing or scan the QR code to access our valuable resources on energy-efficient housing.