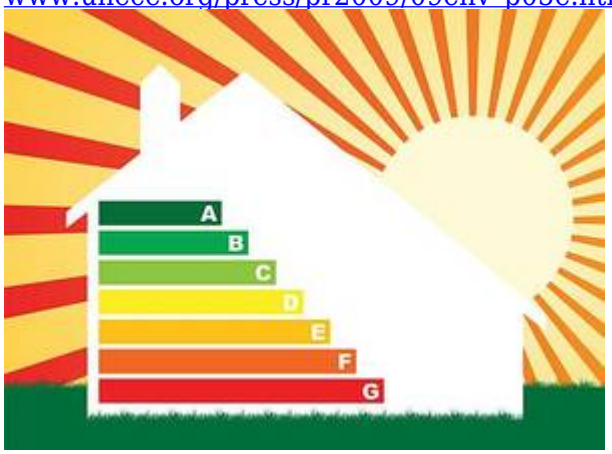
www.unece.org/press/pr2009/09env_p05e.html



Geneva

Investing in housing energy efficiency is more effective than building new power plants, concluded the first UNECE Workshop on Energy Efficiency in Housing held on 21 and 22 April 2009 in Sofia. According to EU data, for instance, for every euro invested in the sustainable refurbishment of housing, 2 euros that would have been needed for the production of energy are saved. In general, retrofitting homes in an energy-efficient way and building new houses with energy-saving technologies also brings direct benefits both to families' health and to their purses. In addition to improved indoor climatic conditions, it is estimated that each household can save from €200 to €1,000 a year.

The benefits of investing in energy efficient homes go beyond individual advantages, however. They can provide tools to address both the financial crisis and climate change. Some countries have already seized on the opportunity to invest in housing refurbishment to create new jobs and boost their national economies. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has singled out building as the sector with the greatest potential for reducing projected baseline emissions by 2020.

The Sofia workshop highlighted that retrofitting multi-storey family buildings is an urgent need in many countries in the UNECE region. In Bulgaria alone, the multi-family housing stock needing refurbishment numbers 80,000 units for over 2 million people. Refurbishment programmes thus offer an opportunity for energy-efficient solutions that can lead to considerable energy savings for countries.

Much potential exists for buildings to drastically reduce their energy consumption and reach the zero emission target. Examples of passive housing discussed during the workshop showed that low and zero emissions – and even houses producing energy and returning excesses to the common network – are not science fiction, but a reality that needs to be supported by the right technologies, legal frameworks and financial schemes.

Lack of knowledge of what the housing sector can offer in terms of energy efficiency impedes government and private sector investment in the area. In addition, a number of constraints hamper the sector's ability for innovation, including outdated legislation, organizational barriers and technological backwardness.

Participants presented examples of energy-efficient housing from throughout the UNECE region as well as related financial and carbon offsetting mechanisms and supporting policies. Specific case studies came from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and Sweden.

The conclusions and recommendations from the workshop will pave the way for the development of an Action Plan on Energy Efficiency in Housing for the UNECE region. Its main elements will be developed through the second UNECE Workshop on Energy Efficiency in Housing, to be held from 23 to 25 November 2009 in Vienna. A call for papers for the Vienna workshop, to focus on existing and proposed solutions and measures, will be issued in the coming weeks by the UNECE secretariat.

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