



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

Geneva, 2-4 October 2019

Item 2(a) of the provisional agenda

Review of the implementation of the programme of work 2018-2019:**Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development****Summary of the Guidelines on evidence-based policies and decision-making for sustainable housing and urban development****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

At its seventy-ninth session held in October 2018, the Committee took note of the preparation of the Guidelines for data collection for evidence-based housing and urban development policies and invited the Bureau to present the guidelines for the Committee's endorsement at its eightieth session.

The Guidelines were prepared within the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) 10th tranche project "Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition", which is being implemented in 2016-2020 by the ECE Housing and Land Management Unit and UN-Habitat.

The Committee is invited to take note of the implementation of activities of the UNDA project, to endorse the guidelines and related recommendations as contained in this document and in the Information Note ECE/HBP/2019/ Inf. 1.



I. Introduction

1. Countries in the ECE region face diverse urban development challenges: lack of access to urban infrastructure, urban sprawl, migration, informal development, homelessness, environmental pollution, low resilience to climate change, and most importantly, limited access to adequate and affordable housing.
2. There is a common understanding between both policymakers and experts that the lack of reliable data and evidence and an insufficient capacity of the governments to use this data (to develop and monitor the implementation of the housing and urban development policies) bring about a range of negative effects. It is one of the key reasons of why many policy objectives have not been achieved so far and why there is still a slow progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG11. Establishing better standards for the production, management and use of data and evidence in policy-making became a global objective under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Governments in the ECE countries have already implemented various measures to promote access to affordable decent housing and urban infrastructure; however, multiple challenges remain.
3. The discussions that took place during the national workshops conducted within the UNDA project “Evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development in selected countries with economies in transition”¹ demonstrated that national, regional and local governments and other stakeholders in the ECE Region: (i) require further support to develop national and local sets of indicators for monitoring and implementation of sustainable housing and urban development policies and the Sustainable Development Goals; and (ii) need to improve production, management and use of evidence in the policy processes and decision-making for sustainable urban development. These Guidelines, contained in Information Note ECE/HBP/2019/ Inf.1, were developed to support the governments in this evidence-based policy-making process.

II. Objectives and approach of the Guidelines

4. The Guidelines are aimed at supporting efforts of the national governments in the ECE Region to improve approaches to evidence-based policy-making on sustainable urban development and housing. The guidelines have the following objectives:
 - (a) To provide information on the requirements for the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE countries with the view to achieve SDG11 and other urban-related SDGs as well as (i) to present existing international legal and institutional frameworks that support evidence-based policy-making at global, regional, national and local levels; (ii) to explain the benefits of applying evidence-based approach(es) to policy-making on sustainable urban development and housing;
 - (b) To provide examples of policy instruments that can be used to develop data and evidence for policy and decision-making; with a view to improve implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda at all levels and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG11.
5. The Guidelines were developed for the ECE Region where the UN Development Account project was implemented. However, they are also relevant to countries outside the ECE region. The Guidelines are expected to serve as a practical reference document for policy-makers and experts involved in development and review of policies for sustainable urban development and housing. The Guidelines can be used at all stages of the policy development - from agenda setting and policy formulation to the implementation/review and evaluation.

¹ <https://www.unece.org/housing/unda10.html>.

III. Summary of chapters

6. **The Introduction** of the Guidelines includes information on the objectives of the guidelines, definitions and the scope of the guidelines, especially in relation to the notions of “data”, “evidence” and “evidence-based policy-making”. The Introduction also provides background on data collection approaches used for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and highlights a variety of approaches to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the ECE region.

7. **Chapter One on “Global and Regional Development Agendas and Monitoring Frameworks for Housing and Urban Development”** provides an overview of policy frameworks and policy monitoring tools related to Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda, specifically in relation to housing and urban development issues. This includes the global SDG framework and indicator set, the EU SDG indicators, the Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities and the UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index. The chapter flags that the European Union institutions developed own mechanisms for the review of SDG implementation. The chapter concludes that there are overlapping global and regional agendas for sustainable urban development with their corresponding reporting requirements; and that better coordination of these different agendas and coherence between their requirements (e.g. regarding composition of the indicator sets) should be ensured. It reaffirms that policy-makers at the national level should take action, first, to develop national systems of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to follow relevant international guidelines for the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for this purpose; second, to promote harmonisation between different national sectoral policies objectives and policy-making processes (horizontal coordination); and third, to involve municipalities and (other) local stakeholders in the national process of evidence-based policy-making housing and urban development policies, including at the stages of policy development and implementation.

8. **Chapter Two “Producing data for housing and urban development policy and decision-making”** provides definitions to the terms “data” and “evidence-based policy” and explains why data is important in policy process and decision-making. It stresses the importance of gaining access to good quality data, of a sufficient detail, as a precondition for developing adequate (policy) responses to housing and urban development problems in the ECE countries. The chapter underlines the importance of following internationally approved procedures for data collection to ensure that data are reliable. The chapter emphasizes that, although considerable progress has been made to produce better data for policy on sustainable housing and urban development, policy-makers at various levels still face difficulties in accessing and producing data of a high quality and accurately reflecting the housing and urban challenges on the ground.

9. The chapter discusses various sources of data for evidence-based policy (such as official statistics, big data etc) and provides a description of methods for sourcing and production of this data. Specifically, the chapter reflects on “types” of data on housing and urban development collected through the Population and Housing Censuses.² The relationship between the national censuses and the national and local surveys of housing is highlighted in the Guidelines. Data gathered using the survey can be used to datasets developed using the census as the survey provides opportunities to produce data for a policy on regular basis, which is particularly important when developing housing and urban development policies in rapidly changing urban environment; and to improve access to data for SDG reporting in the ECE countries. As the National Censuses are carried out every 10 years, improving the use of the surveys is encouraged across the ECE countries.

10. The chapter reiterates that policy-makers face increasing financial pressure and that globalisation and development of information technologies have considerably changed the context in which they operate. It also points out that the National Statistical Offices are not the sole of organisations producing data for policy and recalls contributions of private sector organizations, international and intersectoral partnerships, academic institutions and

² <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/alternativeCensusDesigns.htm>.

technical and planning institutes to improving the availability and the quality of data used for housing and urban development policies and decision-making. Thanks to the overview the readers also can better understand opportunities and challenges relating to the production and sourcing of “new” types of data, especially big data, geospatial information (GIS) and citizen-generated data in contemporary evidence-based policy-making.

11. Several successful examples of partnerships that maximised the potential of data in the policy process are addressed in the chapter. It includes the CBS Urban Data Centre in the Netherlands, comprising of the Statistics Netherlands and municipalities, which has become a hub for housing and urban development data in the country. Several NGOs in Barcelona supported local policy-makers by collecting data necessary to understand housing and homelessness challenges in the city and design adequate policy responses. The chapter concludes that improving production and sourcing of data for policy on sustainable housing and urban development means improving capacities of the whole National Statistical Systems in the ECE countries, and flow of data between the National Statistical Offices and organisation responsible for policy implementation.

12. Having outlined “conventional” and “new” sources of data for evidence-based policies, **Chapter Three “Developing Evidence for Policy-making on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development”** (i) explains how data becomes evidence, and (ii) outlines a variety of means of ensuring that evidence used in policy-making is reliable and reflects the key premises of the 2030 Agenda and housing and urban challenges at all levels. The chapter informs the reader that “evidence” emerges as a result of data analysis and that is carried out in a particular manner (e.g. is developed in relation to a particular policy option – it creates a case “for” or “against” a specific policy response) and that it must be reliable.

13. The chapter further stresses that in light of the 2030 Agenda, better evidence is needed about how various groups of people are affected by unsustainable urban growth and lack of access to decent quality and affordable housing. The chapter reiterates a need to carry out “data disaggregation” to derive data and produce evidence for policy and enables the reader to understand how data should be disaggregated according to gender, age, ethnicity, income, disability, migratory status, and in relation to a particular scale.

14. Analysing data through the above-mentioned categories enables to accurately understand the scale of housing and urban development problems across space. It allows: the comparison of data on access to housing and urban infrastructure of vulnerable groups to national averages, the identification of vulnerable groups lagging behind, and understanding why and to what extent certain groups are “lagging behind”. Such an analysis allows for elaboration of targeted measures to improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of all, including the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of the population.

15. It also provides insights into the ways to “aggregate” data for better implementation and review of sustainable housing and urban development policies, especially how to develop the indicator sets as it would be useful for review of the Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda in line with international standards. Finally, the chapter stresses the importance of improving the literacy of policy-makers, analysts, stakeholders at all levels as a precondition to carry out data analysis processes to an excellent standard.

16. As the previous chapters of the guidelines focus on the production of data and developing evidence for policies on sustainable housing urban development, **Chapter Four “Informing Housing and Urban Development Policy and Decision-making”** focuses on improving (i) the effectiveness of evidence-based policy-making process as a whole (including the timeliness of policy responses to housing and urban development problems at all levels), and (ii) the effectiveness of review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the ECE countries, especially in relation to SDG11.

17. The chapter emphasizes that decision-making in the evidence-based policy cycle is determined by a range of factors and has a particularly strong “subjective” and “interactive” character. It reiterates that decision-making extends across various stages of the policy process and that policy-makers need to make deliberate efforts to develop policies and adopt decisions based on evidence which will minimise the roles of personal and other biases.

18. The chapter stresses that various kinds of data should be used in order to develop comprehensive responses to the housing and urban development challenges in the ECE countries. Variety of data types results from the disaggregation of data and relates to various “aspects” of housing and urban development: society (and social relations), economy, environment.

19. The chapter informs on the methodologies that could be used to generate evidence for policy and inform policy in a timely manner, including “in-advance” (ex-ante) approaches to policy analysis, foresight methodologies, integrated sustainability assessments and regulatory impact assessments. Strengths and weaknesses of selected approaches are explained. Lastly, the chapter points to several “ground rules” for informing housing policy and decision-making and the entire policy cycle, which are embracing “universality” of the subject of housing, deploying a collaborative approach to evidence-based policy as a precondition to delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

20. The Guidelines conclude with “**Conclusions and Recommendations**” that focus on key messages for policy makers at all levels.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

21. The guidelines formulate the following recommendations for improving policies on sustainable housing and urban development in the ECE region through the application of approaches based on evidence and through a better alignment with the 2030 Agenda goals and targets, especially SDG11.

A. Ensure an integrated and coordinated approach to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

22. Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the participation of all relevant stakeholders, at the global, regional, national, subnational and sub-regional levels. Therefore, the guidelines stress the importance of ensuring an integrated and coordinated approach to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, achieving the SDG11 and other housing and urban-related SDGs.

23. In particular:

(a) ***Increase Awareness.*** Policy-makers at all levels should be aware of the reporting requirements emerging as a result of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their country and promote this awareness across the institutional spectrum. It is the role of the government to clearly communicate approach(es) to the realisation of housing and urban-related goals of the Agenda, to various stakeholders, especially municipalities and National Statistical Offices;

(b) ***Align Policies and Monitoring Frameworks.*** As countries are responsible for mainstreaming SDG11 into the National Sustainable Development Strategies, development policies on housing and urban development. They are encouraged to improve convergence between existing housing and urban policy monitoring frameworks processes and the processes of review of the 2030 Agenda objectives and targets;

(c) ***Streamline national efforts of data collection and analysis.*** Governments should streamline efforts of the review of the implementation of SDG 11 by developing roadmaps on statistics for SDGs and the National Reporting Platforms, which allow for better coordination of national and international processes of data collection and to store data in one place;

(d) ***Ensure regular monitoring of Policy implementation.*** With a view to enhance the quality of review of SDG11 and to improve accountability of agencies involved, governments need to ensure that reporting on SDGs takes place regularly and accounts on interlinkages between SDG11 and other SDGs;

(e) ***Connect Data Producers.*** The National Statistical Offices need to better cooperate with other organisations and agencies of the National Statistical System and the

Ministries in charge review of SDG 11 and other agencies in charge of policy development and implementation in relation to housing and urban development;

(f) *Ensure Data Quality.* National Statistical Offices need to make sure that the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achievement of the SDG 11 and other housing and urban-related goals are based on high-quality data and a reliable indicator set and are encouraged to use international standards for data collection in order to improve quality of the review process;

(g) *Explore Opportunities for the Use of Alternative Data Sources.* In the contexts of limited access to data, National Statistical Offices should ensure that “proxy indicators” used closely correspond to global indicators and should explore opportunities to use non-statistical indicators and administrative data, to inform the indicators.

B. Support openness of the data collection processes

24. The guidelines emphasize that evidence-based policy-making requires improving the capacities of organisations and agencies responsible for the production of data and promoting openness of the use of the data as a precondition to the production of a high-quality data for housing and urban development policies and for reporting on SGDs. To promote the capacity building of the organisations producing the data, it is recommended:

(a) *Strengthen the capacity and the role of the National Statistical Offices in data collection and analysis.* Systematic measures should be taken to improve capacities of the National Statistical Offices and other organisations and agencies of the National Statistical Systems in ECE countries, especially in countries with economies in transition;

(b) *Stimulate Local Data Production.* Building capacity of local actors, especially of the local and regional authorities and statistics offices, to source and produce data requires special attention of the governments and international organisations;

(c) *Consider wider use of Open Data.* Policy-makers at all levels should consider making various types of data publicly available. Opening data for public use has beneficial impacts on the quality of data and the production of evidence used in policy process and decision-making; also, opening data tends to improve accountability of data producers by multiplying quality checks by different stakeholders;

(d) *Engage Private Sector.* Policy-makers and other stakeholders, especially private sector organisations, should work together to improve the openness of data, especially in relation to housing market data and housing construction data as it strongly influences on housing affordability;

(e) *Engage Third Parties, including the private sector, in data production.* Policy-makers are encouraged to engage in partnerships with municipalities, National Statistical Offices and their agencies, private sector organisations and NGOs in order to increase their capacities to timely produce data on housing and urban development. Successful models of such partnerships should be scaled up, when possible;

(f) *Ensure data privacy and security.* While developing partnerships with private sector organisations, data privacy and anonymity should be ensured. Government and private sector organisations should be kept accountable for how they handle the data.

C. Promote comprehensive and integrated approaches to the organisation of data

25. The Guidelines highlight that policy-makers need to develop comprehensive and integrated approaches to evidence-based policy-making, in relation to data collection and development of evidence, in order to maximise the potential of data in the policy process and improve quality and reliability of data and evidence circulating in the policy process. Specifically:

(a) **Break the Siloes.** Policy-makers at all level need to make efforts to break the “silo mentality” in relation housing policies by better recognising “externalities” of policy interventions, e.g. positive and negative “effects” of housing policies and programs in relation to various policy domains: social policy, economic policy and others;

(b) **Think Big, Think Forward.** Policy-makers need to produce data and evidence on immediate, medium and long-term outcomes and effects of policy interventions, in relation to various aspects of urban life – society, economy, environment and others; and at various scales – local, regional, national and supra-national, when necessary;

(c) **Apply Integrated Methods for Data Production and Analysis.** In this vein, the organisations involved in data production are encouraged to use integrated and comprehensive methodologies and frameworks for production and analysis of data for policy, e.g. the integrated sustainability assessment and territorial assessment tools, in order to better recognise and effectively address complex housing and urban development challenges;

(d) **Ensure Data Quality.** Policy-makers need to recognize that quality of assessments and evaluation of policy implementation varies and there is a need to improve relevant procedures and better invest in quality assurance tools;

(e) **Engage Academia to Promote Evidence-based Policy-making.** It is essential that policy-makers use best available academic studies, evidence stemming from policy analysis and scientific evaluation as the basis for their policies;

(f) **Undertake Peer Review.** Policy-makers at all levels need to use internal and external peer-review procedures to ensure the highest reliability and clarity of evidence used in the policy process;

(g) **Combine Data Sources for Better Analysis.** Policy-makers at all levels need to combine various sources of data to develop reliable and grounded evidence, from public sector data (e.g. the national statistics) to big data, and better recognise various roles of in policy-making and effectively;

(h) **Go Circular.** Policy-makers need to better recognise the value of the “circular approach” to evidence-based policy-making on sustainable housing and urban development that avoids fragmentation in use of evidence in policy-making and ensures that evidence derived during policy evaluation is used for policy-development, also across various policy initiatives.

D. Reduce bias

26. The guidelines stress the need to ensure that the processes of informing policies on sustainable housing and urban development are impartial and unbiased vis-a-vis data collection, development of evidence and decision-making, in order to address effectively housing challenges in the ECE countries. Specifically:

(a) **Structure Decision Making Process.** Policy-makers should use institutionally derived, structured approaches to decision-making;

(b) **Give Priority to the Use of Integrated Tools.** Especially, the decision-makers should use primarily policy tools and instruments that allow connecting the processes of data sourcing, data analysis and decision-making (such as integrated sustainability assessment tools) as they limit opportunities for exercising personal and other biases;

(c) **Mind the Time.** Policy-makers need to particularly consider the role of timing in decision-making, across stages of the policy process. Timing affects the quality of data and whether (and how) data and evidence enter the policy process. For instance, evidence emerging at latter stages of decision-making can be excluded from the policy process;

(d) **Anticipate Risks.** The decision-makers should also better use foresight, impact assessments, integrated sustainability assessments in order to make decision-making

more forward-looking and improving management of risks relating to adverse effects of policy initiatives:

(e) ***Provide training in Data Analysis.*** Policy-makers at all levels need to better invest in skills development and training for policy analysts as it translates into better reliability and objectivity of evidence produced;

(f) ***Adopt Collaborative Tools for Data Production.*** Policy transfer should explore the use of collaborative tools for evidence-based decision-making especially during data production, evidence development and definition of policy priorities, such as (regulatory) impact assessment tools, which ensure that policy proposals are grounded and based on reliable evidence;

(g) ***Share Knowledge and Promote Exchange of Best Practices.*** Policy-makers and stakeholders at all levels should also further invest in sharing knowledge and “good practices” regarding available policy instruments and policy tools for review of SDG11 and other housing and urban-related targets at all levels;

(h) ***Communicate Policies.*** Policy-makers at all levels are required to communicate policy initiatives to the general public in a clear, transparent manner, making use of the best available tools, removing as much as possible technical, cultural and economic access barriers;

(i) ***Disseminate Evidence to Public.*** Policy-makers should especially make deliberate efforts to compile and present data and evidence used in decision-making in a clear, and easy to read format, in statistical and non-statistical form.
