

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
27 July 2020

Original: English

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

Geneva, 6-8 October 2020

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Ministerial Meeting on**Urban Development, Housing and Land Management 2021****Preparations for the Ministerial Meeting on Urban
Development, Housing and Land Management 2021****Note by the Bureau of the Committee***Summary*

At its eightieth session in October 2019, the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management decided to organize a Ministerial Meeting in October 2021 to review and discuss further steps in the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (endorsed in 2015), as well as the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management 2014-2020 (adopted in 2013) and the Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development (adopted in 2017).

This document contains a concept note to guide the organization of the 2021 Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management. The document was reviewed by the Committee Bureau at its meeting on 17 July 2020.

The Committee will be invited to review and agree on the proposal for the Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management 2021, as contained in the Note.



I. Introduction

1. Established in 1947, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management is the only intergovernmental body addressing the housing and urban development challenges of the ECE region and is the highest policymaking body of ECE in housing, urban development and land management. The Committee includes representatives of both national and local governmental institutions - dealing with housing, urban development, and land administration and management.
2. The work of the Committee is based on key United Nations policy documents on housing and urban development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (2015), as well as the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020 (2013) and the Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development (2017).
3. The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing is a key policy document guiding the work of the Committee. The development of the Charter began in 2009 and it was endorsed by ECE as a non-legally binding document in 2015. The Charter aims to support member States as they seek to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all. It is based on four principles of sustainable housing: (a) environmental protection; (b) economic effectiveness; (c) social inclusion and participation; and (d) cultural adequacy.
4. At its eightieth session in October 2019, the Committee decided to organize a Ministerial Meeting in October 2021 to review and discuss further steps in the implementation of the Charter, the ECE Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management 2014-2020 and the Ministerial Declaration (ECE/HBP/201). This document contains a concept note to guide the organization of the 2021 ECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.

II. Concept note for the Ministerial Meeting

5. The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing underlines that: “sustainable housing has a key role in the quality of human life” and that it can be achieved by developing and implementing laws, policies and programmes which are comprehensive and based on the application of the following principles: environmental protection, economic effectiveness, social inclusion and participation, and cultural adequacy.
6. The development of sustainable housing is currently one of the most important policy challenges, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as countries and cities in the ECE region face undersupply of affordable housing, homelessness, rising urban rents, low quality of housing and urban infrastructure, limited access to land for housing construction and renovation, and mounting urban poverty.
7. Lack of access to affordable and adequate housing is especially a challenge for vulnerable groups¹ of the population who suffer from limited access to healthcare, fuel poverty and price inflation of essential goods and services.

¹ According to the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (page 6), the “definition of vulnerable groups and people varies from country to country and may include: young people; senior citizens; large families with children and single parent families; victims of domestic violence; people with disabilities including mental illness, intellectual and/or physical disabilities; immigrants; refugees; Roma communities; and other minority groups.

8. Lack of access to sustainable housing also remains a major challenge for middle-income earners, especially in many large cities where rents are skyrocketing, and the quality of available housing is often low. The middle-income population is therefore often trapped in a gap between not being eligible to access social and other state supported affordable housing and the inability to afford rent or buy adequate housing through the private market. With the global economic slowdown, sudden stop in some sectors of the economy (tourism, hospitality, etc) in some cases and more people losing jobs, the risk of middle-income earners losing their homes in the future grew substantially.

9. The challenges of housing affordability and sustainability in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are affecting cities, especially those which are densely populated. Stoppage of work and closure of the borders is putting a strain on the access of people to medical and social care, food and other basic services. Closure of commercial services in urban areas in light of the crisis has led to a decrease in consumption in cities, thus putting pressure on businesses and their profitability which directly translates into inability of businesses to sustain workforce.

10. Housing sustainability challenges and approaches to addressing them differ from country to country. Given the diverse national and local contexts of the housing sector, and the diverse legal frameworks and living traditions within the ECE region, there is no one approach that fits all. Sharing and exchanging experiences and good practices allows the formulation of viable approaches and policies appropriate for specific national and local contexts.

11. The Ministerial Meeting will be titled “Affordable, adequate and resilient housing in liveable cities”. It will support regional exchange of experiences and good practices around promoting access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing as part of the countries’ response to and recovery plans for the COVID-19 pandemic. As the spread of the virus in countries in the ECE region is likely to deplete public budgets, the discussion will also focus on the development of innovative and sustainable finance in order to ensure continuity of investments in: building affordable, adequate and energy-efficient housing, housing renovations, promoting social and spatial cohesion, and overcoming inequalities.

12. The Ministerial Meeting will launch the report of the study “#Housing2030: Improving Housing Affordability in the UNECE Region” which is being developed by ECE in cooperation with Housing Europe, UN-Habitat and other partners. The study explores the following four topics: housing governance and regulation; access to finance and funding; access and availability of land for housing construction; and climate-neutral housing construction and renovation. The study also addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the housing sector and highlights good practices for improving the affordability and long-term sustainability of housing under each of the four topics. The study, which is implemented in 2020-2021, is aimed to:

- (a) Explore housing affordability challenges and existing policy instruments for improving housing affordability in the ECE region;
- (b) Facilitate the exchange and dissemination of “good practices” in improving housing affordability among countries and cities of the ECE region;
- (c) Identify the needs of policymakers in order to further develop and implement policies addressing housing affordability.

The study report will include a compendium of good practices based on the responses to a 2020 survey of ECE member States conducted by the Committee secretariat.

13. The Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management is further expected to launch a regional action plan for the ECE region “#Housing 2030:

promoting sustainable housing as part of the recovery and rebuilding plans after the COVID-19 pandemic”.

14. The Regional Action Plan is expected to support Governments in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis through the sharing of examples and good practices in facilitating investments and promoting the “building better” approach - as outlined in the report of the United Nations Secretary-General “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19”. For cities and countries in the ECE region this approach also includes rebuilding in a way that increases resilience to disasters, creates more affordable and healthier homes, and reduces homelessness and inequality. The adoption of the Regional Action Plan by the Ministerial Meeting will facilitate an exchange of good practices and experiences, support countries in shaping policy packages and financial measures to promote sustainable housing and urban development.

III. Proposals for the organization of the Ministerial Meeting

15. The Ministerial Meeting titled “Affordable, adequate and resilient housing in liveable cities” is expected to take place in October 2021. The meeting will be a part of the annual ECE Sustainable Cities Week. A schedule of events is as follows:

- (a) Day 1: Roundtable “In Focus: SDG11”;
- (b) Day 2: Forum of Mayors;
- (c) Day 3: Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management;
- (d) Days 4 and 5: Eighty-second session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.

16. The Committee is invited to endorse the proposal for the organization of the ECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, as contained in this concept note.
