



VITAL SPACES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UNECE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT AND THE WORKING PARTY ON LAND ADMINISTRATION

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AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY AND ECOLOGICAL HOUSING: A DREAM OR A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION?

Although crucial for improving peoples' well-being, ensuring the environmentally sound development of economies and building a socially cohesive society, the housing sector in the UNECE region does not receive adequate attention within national development policies. As a result, many countries in this region continue to face considerable difficulties in developing a sustainable housing sector despite progress in their economic development. The following examples illustrate major challenges related to the housing sector in the region:

- a) Unaffordable housing. Inadequate public housing finance instruments and ineffective land use regulations significantly reduce housing affordability and lead to the rapid growth of informal settlements. According to a UNECE study, more than 50 million people in 15 UNECE member States live in informal settlements today. This calls for urgent political, legal and planning solutions¹;
- b) Unsafe and unhealthy homes. In many countries in the region, a large part of the housing stock is poorly maintained and requires renovation, quality and safety of construction remain a challenge, particularly in disaster prone areas, and homes often provide unhealthy environments to live in;
- c) Poor energy efficiency of homes. Low use of renewable energy in the housing sector, high level of carbon emissions from housing, inefficient and polluting waste management systems, and resource-inefficient construction practices are common challenges in the UNECE region. As a result, the residential sector in the region is responsible for up to 40 percent of total

energy use on average². Rationalizing energy use in housing can contribute to resolving such global problems as climate change and energy security, as well as poverty;

- d) Weak regulatory frameworks. The recent financial and economic crisis has highlighted the challenges created by inadequate regulation of real estate and financial markets as well as a lack of transparency in the assessment of the value and the risk of investments in real estate assets. A fully functioning real estate sector can serve as a driving force for development and produce economic, social and environmental benefits for member States.

For decades, the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management has supported countries in tackling major challenges related to affordable, healthy and ecological housing in the region. Support provided by UNECE has included the exchange of experience and best practices on how to deal with the problems of affordable, healthy and ecological housing, and the strengthening of national capacities for housing policy formulation and implementation through the development of policy recommendations and guidelines to promote action in specific areas. Those activities and studies have clearly shown that even major housing challenges do not appear high on the political agenda in the UNECE region. In addition, the housing sector remains often not regulated and standards vary widely amongst countries in the region. Moreover, the practical impact of UNECE policy recommendations is often limited by their voluntary nature.

Aiming to explore the feasibility of establishing a more formalised UNECE-wide policy framework and to address the housing sector in a comprehensive manner, the Committee on Housing and Land Management has developed a background document on "Principles and Goals for Affordable, Healthy and Ecological Housing"³. This paper, which outlines core principles and goals for achieving affordable, healthy and ecological housing in the region, was

¹ Self-Made Cities: In Search of Sustainable Solutions for Informal Settlements in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region (ECE/HBP/155, 2009).

² Green Homes: Towards Energy-efficient Housing in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region (ECE/HBP/159, 2009).

³ ECE/HBP/2010/6

considered by the Committee at its seventy-first session in September 2010.

Following the discussion of this document, UNECE member States decided to set up a Working Group to explore the possibility of establishing a legally binding instrument on affordable, healthy and ecological housing in the UNECE region which could integrate the existing fragmented and non-legally binding international documents under a single policy framework. They also suggested that future discussions on this issue should reflect different economic realities and priorities across the region and promote the development of a platform for cooperation and exchange of best practice experience among member States.

The overall goal of the Working Group is to analyse the potential added value, as well as any advantages and drawbacks, of a possible UNECE-wide legally binding instrument on affordable, healthy and ecological housing, and, as appropriate, to define the scope, objectives and possible options for such an instrument. As a result of its deliberations, the Working Group is expected to produce a report to be presented for consideration at the seventy-second session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management.

So far, 32 member States have nominated their representatives to the Working Group which held its first meeting in Geneva on 11-12 April 2011. Delegates from 30 member States participated in this meeting to share their countries' experience, needs and examples of best practices in the area of affordable, healthy and ecological housing, and to explore the potential added value of a possible UNECE-wide legally binding instrument in this area. Topics discussed included also the importance of sustainable housing provision for building an environmentally sustainable and socially cohesive society, and the role of legally binding instruments in addressing international challenges. The next Working Group meeting will be held on 5 and 6 July 2011 in Geneva.

For more information about the Working Group, including its Terms of Reference and report of its first meeting, please visit the following web page: <http://www.unece.org/hlm/wgaheh/welcome.htm>.

MAKING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AN ACHIEVABLE VISION

First training workshop on "Affordable Housing Provision in CIS countries" Raubichi, Belarus, 14-17 March 2011

To achieve the goal of ensuring adequate housing choice and affordability, housing issues needs to be placed high on national development agendas. This was one of the main messages given to the participants of the first training workshop on "Affordable Housing Provision in CIS countries", which was held in Raubichi, Belarus from 14 to 17 March 2011.

Organized jointly by UNECE, UN-HABITAT and the Ministry of Architecture and Construction of Belarus, the workshop brought together more than 30 government officials and experts from nine CIS countries who are directly



responsible for housing policy development and implementation.

To make housing affordable and energy efficient is a challenge in the UNECE region, particularly in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Housing costs are constantly going up, which has serious implications for the population, and especially for vulnerable groups. Inadequate instruments for financing public housing, underdeveloped or unbalanced housing markets, and a lack of local and national capacity further reduce housing affordability and increase the number and size of informal settlements. The overall objective of the training was to strengthen the capacity of national experts to address the challenge of affordable housing. The workshop provided experience-based knowledge and international case studies illustrating various policy approaches developed in the UNECE region to secure access to housing.

Presentations at the workshop highlighted the most common challenges to ensuring sustainable housing in CIS countries, and provided expert advice on how to develop effective policy responses. They also showcased good practices in achieving affordable and energy efficient housing.

The workshop devoted particular attention to issues such as social and rental housing, legal mechanisms to secure housing accessibility, financial and economic aspects of social housing provision, policies and technological aspects of housing energy efficiency, and the maintenance and management approaches to multi-family housing.

Open and lively discussions during the workshop also led to the identification of a number of country-specific needs and areas that could be addressed by future capacity-building activities in support of the development of a sustainable housing sector in CIS countries.

ROUNDTABLE IN PORTUGAL EXAMINES POLICY REFORMS TO BOOST THE REAL ESTATE SECTOR



Real estate and property markets underpin our national economies. They are the principal destination of a household's savings and the most solid component of a country's capital stock. For many UNECE member States with economies in transition, improving their legal and institutional frameworks for the real estate sector is an urgent priority. But the issue is also being seriously discussed in the countries of Western Europe worst hit by the economic downturn.

As part of its initiatives to promote sound regulations for the real estate sector, UNECE held a roundtable in Lisbon on 27 January. The event was jointly organized by the International Real Estate Federation (FIABCI), the Portuguese Real Estate Agents and

Professionals Association (APEMIP) and the UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group.

Participants examined the relevance for Portugal of a recent UNECE publication aimed at authorities engaged in regulatory reforms, "Policy Framework for Sustainable Real Estate Markets: Principles and Guidance for the Development of a Country's Real Estate Sector."

Speakers included Mr. Paulo Campos, Secretary of State for Public Construction and Communications of Portugal and Mr. João Tiago Silveira, Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Portugal. They said that market actors were confident and optimistic and that the real estate sector was showing resilience despite the current adverse economic and financial conditions. However, Portugal needed to create incentives for rehabilitating old building units and simplify the rules for leasing property.

Government officials, representatives of professional associations, the private sector and academics also participated in the roundtable. Speakers discussed how the principles contained in the Policy Framework publication might be applied to Portugal's present challenges:

- The need for appropriate spatial planning regulations on land use to prevent speculation on the value of land.
- The need to streamline the registration of real estate transactions and mortgages through e-Government reforms.
- The need to increase the size of the rental sector so as to provide more affordable housing for vulnerable populations.
- The need to promote increased foreign investment to spur economic growth.

One of the conclusions of the discussions was that multi-stakeholder involvement would be fundamental to ensuring further policy change. The UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group offered to support continued consultations among international experts and national authorities to help implement legislative reforms to address the above challenges.

Download the publication Policy Framework for Sustainable Real Estate Markets: Principles and Guidance for the Development of a Country's Real Estate Sector, <http://unece.org/hlm/documents/Publications/policy.framework.e.pdf>



HOUSING IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: MOVING FROM A FINANCIAL TO A HUMAN FOCUS

To provide sustainable and affordable housing solutions in the region, policies should pursue people-centered models that focus on the importance of housing to development, declare four international organizations at the end of the first Housing Forum for Europe and Central Asia.

Housing should be about need and social engagement. During recent years, housing and housing-related risks have increased. However, available solutions still heavily depend on the developers and financial institutions which have the power to influence housing policies. To provide sustainable models, the housing agenda needs to focus on people and their needs and look at housing as a fundamental human right.

These were the conclusions voiced by the participants of the first Housing Forum Europe & Central Asia that finished on Wednesday, April 6, in Budapest, Hungary. They also underlined a number of challenges that housing faces in the region and globally: it is politically unattractive; financially expensive; solutions are non-standard; and extremely complex. At the same time, it is possible to catalyze change and find innovative housing solutions. This can be achieved through the joint efforts of the NGO community, businesses and governments.

"We are committed to a common vision for housing. By 2020, we would like to see our children grow up in inclusive, secure, diverse and energy-efficient places, safe against natural disasters. One way of achieving this vision, is through increased collaboration," said Don Haszczyzn, area vice-president for Habitat for Humanity.

"We are at the beginning of this conversation. It was the first event, and it is really surprising that we have not done anything like that up to this moment", said Graham Saunders, head of Shelter department at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and one of co-organizing partners of the first Forum.

"We will go back and look at the people-centered models we can support. Then, we will be looking at the available financial means to keep them going. The energy-efficiency component should also be prioritized, as it really can help solve many problems for poor households in this region", said Jens Wandel, UNDP deputy regional bureau director and director of UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre.

"Energy efficiency in housing offers the double benefit of safeguarding our environment and reducing the fuel poverty of many in the region."

The three-day gathering brought together almost 150 delegates from 48 organizations and countries. They came to discuss key issues of the housing sector and to create an evidence-based agenda for promoting and achieving a vision for sustainable housing for all in the region. The Forum was organized by four international organizations – Habitat for Humanity International, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

Organizing partners also promised to start laying the groundwork for the second housing forum for this region in two years.

WHAT'S NEW:

THE HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT UNIT HAS MOVED!

With the restructuring of the UNECE Environment Division, its Housing and Land Management unit (HLM) has been moved to the UNECE Trade and Timber Division. As a result of this move, the HLM unit will now be under the Director of that Division, now called Division for Trade and Sustainable Land Management, Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos.

Mr. Serhii Yampolskyi remains the secretary to the Committee on Housing and Land Management and all other members of the Unit remain the same. Ms. Paola Deda, who was previously the secretary to the Committee, will once again be taking on an important role in HLM as the Chief of the Sustainable Land Management Section, which includes the Forestry and Timber, as well as the HLM Unit.

AT THE SECRETARIAT:

OUR NEW CONSULTANT



Nina Peeva has joined the Housing and Land Management Unit as a consultant at the beginning of February this year. She is working with us on several projects with special focus on providing support to the Working Group on a Possible Legally Binding Instrument on Affordable, Healthy and Ecological Housing.

Initially, Nina joined our team as an intern for a 6-month period in 2010. She provided assistance in the finalisation of some Country Profiles as well as in the preparation of HLM workshops and the 71st session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management.

Originally from Bulgaria, Nina has studied and worked in several European countries where she gained international experience and fluency in several languages. She holds a Master Degree in International Law from the Sorbonne University in Paris, France.

Nina can be contacted by e-mail at: nina.peeva@unece.org.

OUR NEW INTERN



Monica Hornung is from Chile with Germanic-Arabic heritage that has been important to the development of her strengths and interests, which have evolved within a culturally diverse environment. She has recently started her internship at UNECE for the Housing and Land Management Unit and will stay for three months.

Monica has university degrees in two areas of studies: International Relations and Economics. She is currently concluding an International MBA programme with specialization in Country Risk Management at Politecnico di Milano. Her previous collaboration with the Chilean Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Diplomatic Academy) gave her the opportunity to put into practice all knowledge acquired in her studies through various conferences she has organized in South America. Experience gained in her work has been extremely helpful in writing her degree dissertation "European Identity and Democratic Deficit: The Problems in the Foundations of Integration", which has been awarded the best dissertation prize (2007) by the European Community Studies Association (ECSA).

Monica welcomes her internship at the UNECE with enthusiasm.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

UNECE 'ACTION PLAN ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN HOUSING' NOW AVAILABLE



Energy efficiency in housing in most UNECE countries is far from ideal. In general, the existing infrastructure providing energy services is outmoded and inefficient; the majority of new buildings are constructed with inappropriate technologies; and the

housing stock is not being adequately renovated. The general public's awareness of daily energy use patterns is low and there are also institutional barriers preventing the widespread adoption of green technologies in housing.

Buildings are responsible for over one third of total energy consumption in the UNECE region, much of which occurs in the residential sector. Consequently, buildings are the ultimate source of a considerable portion of green house gas (GHG) emissions. The sector uses far more energy than it needs to provide comfort and services. In other words, it is wasteful.

At the same time, the residential sector could generate one of the highest energy savings in comparison to other sectors. Data from the International Panel on Climate Change, for instance, indicates a global potential to reduce by 29% the projected baseline emissions from the residential and commercial sectors by 2020 through cost-effective energy-efficient technologies¹.

To address the challenges of improving energy efficiency in the housing sector, the UNECE has published an *Action Plan for Energy Efficient Housing in the UNECE Region*. The overall aim is to establish the necessary institutional conditions to improve housing energy efficiency through institutional, technological and cultural change. For instance, for energy efficiency standards in buildings, the Action Plan proposes to enact mandatory standards, which can stimulate far greater improvements than voluntary ones. At present, however, voluntary codes predominate in spite of the fact that they have failed to work effectively.

For financing energy-efficient investments, the Action Plan proposes developing a transparent system of subsidies, grants, loans, public investment programmes and leasing. Such instruments should be targeted at stakeholders, including owners, tenants, builders, technology producers and retailers.

The Action Plan also highlights the need to create an "energy aware" culture that will help energy-conscious behaviour become the norm among the general public.

Finally, the Action Plan emphasizes that coordination and leadership among government authorities is fundamental. A specific tool to facilitate this coordination can be regional and local energy planning, of which housing must be an integral part.

The implementation of the Action Plan will help UNECE member States to progressively move towards a low-energy housing sector.

As a unique pan-European forum for promoting sustainable development and facilitating economic cooperation in the region, the UNECE is well placed to assist its member States in achieving the goals contained in the Action Plan.

To download the Action Plan, please access the following link: <http://live.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/action.plan.eehousing.pdf>

For further information, please contact:

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¹ Green homes, towards energy efficient housing in the UNECE region, 2009, p. 13.

UNECE WORKSHOP ON CADASTRAL AND REAL ESTATE REGISTRATION SYSTEMS: ECONOMIC INFORMATION FOR REAL ESTATE MARKETS IN THE UNECE REGION

Rome, 5-6 May 2011

The world economic crisis has provided new evidence that the real estate sector plays a significant role underpinning the national economies in the UNECE region. Comprehensive, accurate and detailed economic information about the real estate sector is a valuable tool for guiding the economic choices of government authorities, private investors and consumers. It is also relevant to the professional training of experts who can contribute to the stability of markets. To better understand the role of cadastral and real estate registration systems in providing information for real estate markets and to discuss the impact of technological innovations and institutional change at the local, national and international level, the UNECE Working Party on Land Administration in cooperation with Agenzia del Territorio, Italy are organizing a workshop to take place in Rome, Italy, on 5 and 6 May 2011.

Sound real estate markets require transparency in their institutional frameworks. If well monitored and regulated, the real estate sector could be a driving force for development, producing social, economic and environmental benefits for Member States. These goals can more easily be reached if supported by complete and detailed information about the characteristics of the real estate assets stock, their prices and trading volumes. As countries in the region moved towards unified real property registration systems, it is fundamental that long term measures be taken by authorities to stimulate and support sustainable institutions to secure citizens' ownership rights in land and real estate. Furthermore, ensuring the standardization of real estate valuation and risk assessment is essential for the smooth adjustment to external shocks in times of market volatility.

At present, economic data about real estate markets are collected and analyzed by different actors, including both public institutions and private companies. In several countries, different monitoring systems have emerged that analyze prices and trading volumes, investment risk spreads and the environmental sustainability of investments in the building sector. In all cases, government authorities have a fundamental role to play to ensure measurements are performed in a transparent and accurate manner in line with international standards. Land administration institutions, for instance, play a key role in this process as knowledge management agents through setting standards for market valuation of real estate units as well as for fiscal purposes. Since, to a great extent, real estate market development is affected by its geographic location, land administration institutions can also provide advanced geo-referenced land information systems that effectively capture, store, process, analyze and display spatial data related to the housing market. In sum, effective cadastre and registration systems can provide very useful tools for market actors in the real estate sector and society at large.

The main goal of the workshop will be to analyze the potential of government and private initiatives to produce, manage and share economic knowledge on real estate based on different national experiences. Participants will be encouraged to discuss the role of cadastral and real estate registration systems and their influence on the development of well functioning housing markets, including topics such as follows:

- Information for real estate market efficiency and transparency
- Real estate market monitoring and knowledge tools
- Information for real estate valuation and fiscal purposes
- Geo-referencing of data collected from the real estate market

Speakers from government institutions, the private sector, academia and NGOs are invited to participate in the event. If you need more information or if you wish to participate as a speaker, please contact:

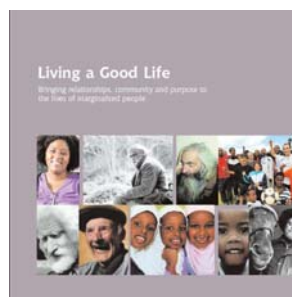
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MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE – A REVIEW OF INNOVATIVE POLICY AND PRACTICE



The publication "Living a Good Life" is the outcome of a Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored meeting at its Bellagio Center in Italy, which brought together 18 social innovators from around the world. The participants are all working to ensure that marginalised and vulnerable people are not only decently housed, but can also feel welcome and lead a dignified life in

the communities in which they live. The participants came from ten countries in six different continents and work with a range of vulnerable individuals and communities, including those whose physical and mental differences set them apart from mainstream society, as well as those excluded by generations of prejudice. Other participants work with homeless people, including the elderly, refugees, migrants and those left behind after the breakdown of the communist system in Eastern Europe.

All of the participants had many years, often decades, of deep personal commitment to their work, enabling them to share lessons gained through long experience. There was a broad harmony of values, with all participants having respect for those individuals who live on the margins of society and recognising the limitations of current welfare systems in addressing their needs and rights.

Of particular significance was the opportunity to share experiences between developing and developed countries. Despite the differences in the level of public resources available in their countries, participants shared tremendous commonality with respect to their basic philosophy and had a great deal to share with

and learn from each other concerning strategies for overcoming their respective problems.

The publication sets out the results of the deliberations and sharing of experience of this group of social innovators over a period of three days. One of the key purposes of the meeting was to identify innovative practices and policies and how they could be implemented to address the persistent and increasing problems faced by those who continue to be excluded and marginalised from society. Brief introductions to 14 such practices are set out in the text with references to where more detailed information can be accessed.

A copy of this publication can be obtained from:

<http://www.bshf.org/published-information/publication.cfm?lang=00&thePubID=EFC80A61-15C5-F4C0-999F7E51F75EEEE1>.

Stephanie Bamford
Trustee, Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF)

A NOTE ON THE COORDINATOR:



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