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Country: Bulgaria

Country initiatives:

- The new model of urban development and housing integrates all aspects of sustainable development to promote equity, welfare, and shared prosperity. Part of the whole process is to improve sustainability of housing through effective policies and actions. Bulgaria has developed several initiatives aiming effective and sustainable housing sharing the main principles of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing.

- We are actively involved in various cooperation formats which help us bring the national housing policy on a new level and exchange best practices and knowledge on how to better address the challenges in the sector and improve the quality of life of our citizens.

- At EU level, the recently adopted Pact of Amsterdam setting the Urban Agenda for the EU has put forward pilot partnership on housing, which aims to contribute to better EU regulation in the housing field. The partnership is open to Bulgarian cities and we encourage them to consider potential participation. As a future EU Presidency in 2018 we will be further involved in the monitoring and follow up of the partnership activities.

- At international level, we are actively involved in processes such as the United Nations HABITAT III. The new global urban agenda is putting great emphasis on affordable and energy efficient housing in urban areas, a priority which the Bulgarian government is fully committed to.

- While the importance of the environmental, economic and social concerns on the impacts of climate change, energy dependence and the depletion of energy resources, and affordability of energy prices steadily increases, the implementation of measures for the reduction of the buildings’ energy consumption is vital, both at national and international level.

- In this context, the buildings’ energy efficiency is a long-term priority and it has been recognized with a high degree of engagement by the Bulgarian Government as well during the past few years. Buildings’ energy efficiency has become a key policy priority for the current Bulgarian Government.

- At national level, Bulgaria has taken a number of steps to improve the housing policy and energy efficiency, especially the energy efficiency of residential through legislative measures and targeted policies and programs.

- A constant update and synchronization of the technical standards, benchmarks and indicators for the design and implementation of energy efficient and safe buildings in line with European standards is being performed. The most
significant improvements in recent years include: the introduction of numerical scale of the energy consumption per different types of buildings, evaluation and proof of energy savings in buildings, new requirements for technical installations and for the quality of the living environment, national definition for nearly zero-energy buildings.

- Moreover, necessary amendments have been introduced in our Condominium Ownership Management Act to ensure greater accuracy of condominums’ rights and obligations, as well as better monitoring of the implementation of those obligations.

- The first steps for energy efficiency improvement of residential buildings in Bulgaria have been taken almost nine years ago.

- Different national initiatives and programmes were developed to address the challenges in housing policy. Initially, Bulgaria started two small scale pilot initiatives and today we already have a large-scale national programme for energy efficiency in multifamily residential buildings of 500 million euro. The latter was launched in 2015 and is still being implemented. The rationale behind the national programme includes the crucial importance of the energy efficiency and the understanding that it provides higher living standard, lower heating costs, safer homes and modern urban area. The programme is implemented throughout the whole country and enjoys a great interest from the population.

- The social effect of the Programme’s implementation is creation of additional employment; establishment of traditions in the management of multi-family residential buildings; raising public awareness of the ways to increase energy efficiency.

- New Operational Programme “Regions in Growth” (OPRG) 2014 – 2020 is developed incompliance with our energy efficiency priorities and supports energy efficiency, smart energy management and renewable energy use in public infrastructures, including in public buildings, and in the housing sector.

- In addition, several social housing projects were financed under the previous Operational Programme “Regional Development” 2007 – 2013. Improving the housing conditions for marginalised groups of the population including the Roma is part of the new Operational Programme “Regions in Growth” 20014 – 2020 as well. The main result that is being sought is ensuring an adequate social infrastructure as a key factor for the effective social inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups in the life of the society. One of the guiding principles in those initiatives is the integrated approach, which aims to combine soft and infrastructure measures as well as different funding sources with a view to address the challenges and needs of vulnerable groups in a more comprehensive way. This involves combination of infrastructure, training, health care, employment and social inclusion measures to tackle segregation and poverty of vulnerable groups. The experience and lessons learned from the implementation of projects for social housing in the last programming period was taken into account and it is envisaged sustainable and targeted work with local communities, incl. information campaigns, through which the necessary public
support and acceptance of social projects aimed at improving the living conditions of vulnerable groups, including Roma, will be provided.

- Public resources are limited and it is necessary to raise the awareness of building owners on the necessity to invest in energy efficiency and in addition to attract and significantly increase the amount of private investment.

- For the period 2020 – 2050 Bulgaria will have as a long-term goal to seek and identify mechanisms for achieving the energy efficiency objectives as set at European and national level until 2050. Additional mechanisms for the stimulation of private investments and for the transition from public grants to other tools will be put in place and they will include series of instruments and policies for the promotion of behaviour changes through fiscal incentives. The introduction of social policies as a support mechanism for low-income owners will also be part of the long-term initiatives to be implemented.