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Review of implementation of the programme of work for 2010–2011**Summary report on the workshops organized under the Programme of Work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

At its meeting in December 2009, the Bureau of the Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) discussed the need to streamline its reporting procedures and agreed that the next CHLM session should be provided with a single document containing short summaries of the workshops implemented during the intersessional period.

The present note contains an overview of workshops organized under the programme of work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management since its seventieth session, held in September 2009.

In line with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Technical Cooperation Strategy,¹ these activities focused on countries with economies in transition, were provided at the request of Governments and/or the recommendation of the Committee, and implemented in those areas where the Committee has a clear comparative advantage over other organizations. Most of the activities were carried out in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, as well as the private sector. Particular attention was given to the involvement of beneficiary countries and the use of national expertise to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of technical cooperation activities implemented under the Committee's programme of work.

¹ Available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/operact/opera/tcoop.html>.

I. International Forum “Towards an Action Plan for Energy-efficient Housing in the UNECE Region”

1. The International Forum, “Towards an Action Plan for Energy-efficient Housing in the UNECE Region”, was held in Vienna from 23 to 25 November 2009. It was co-organized by UNECE, Europaforum Wien and the Vienna City Administration, and the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing. The event was opened by the President of Austria, Heinz Fischer.
2. The Forum was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo (in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.
3. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the International Council of Women, the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS) and Habitat for Humanity International were in attendance.
4. The objective of the International Forum was to discuss the draft “Action Plan for Energy-efficient Housing in the UNECE region”, including what policy areas, goals and actions should be prioritized and incorporated into the Action Plan if it was to guide the UNECE member States in their efforts to improve energy efficiency in housing.
5. The opening session of the Forum addressed the importance of energy efficiency in housing with regard to both climate change policies and the economic and social development of UNECE countries. A presentation of the first draft of the Action Plan was made by UNECE consultant Mr. Oleg Golubchikov, which was followed by feedback from the national ministers for housing of the Republic of Ireland and Tajikistan.
6. In the subsequent discussions, the academic and professional experts and policymakers from the UNECE region shared their experiences and insights on opportunities and challenges for improving the sector’s performance, and identified goals, priority actions and time frames for the Action Plan. These discussions were organized around the following themes: strengthening institutional capacities: legislation, management and finance; developing technological performance and deploying innovations; and improving access to energy efficiency: public housing, affordability and regional differences.
7. The Forum concluded with a one-day field trip, organized by the Vienna City Administration, which presented examples of energy-efficient housing construction and refurbishment projects in Vienna.
8. *Main conclusions and recommendations:* The Forum welcomed the efforts of the UNECE secretariat to develop the draft Action Plan. It was stressed that its overall goal should be a transformation towards zero-energy and zero-carbon housing, although the draft Action Plan should allow for sufficient operational variations in achieving that ambition in the diverse institutional and geographical context of the UNECE region. That ambition should also be harmonized with the social, economic and ecological performance of housing, including housing affordability and access to energy services. The first draft of the Action Plan presented to the Forum’s participants was found to be innovative, appropriate and flexible enough to strategically orient and frame policies of the member

States in that direction. The Forum therefore endorsed the first draft of the Action Plan and provided a number of recommendations to be incorporated into its final draft.

II. Workshop on Efficient and Transparent Land Management in ECE countries

9. The workshop was held in Baku on 4 and 5 March 2010. It was organized by UNECE in cooperation with the State Committee on Property Issues of Azerbaijan, which hosted the event.

10. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

11. Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and Eurogeographics, as well as members of the Committee's Real Estate Market Advisory Group, were also in attendance.

12. The workshop was organized in the context of the reform of the real estate registration system in Azerbaijan, including the development of an automated system for cadastre and registration services.

13. The objective of the workshop was to improve the knowledge and understanding of national policymakers and practitioners regarding best practices and lessons learned from similar reforms in other countries of the UNECE region.

14. Presentations addressed a variety of land administration issues, including inter-agency cooperation in the context of the merging of cadastre and registration activities and different policy implications of the digitalization of information on land and real estate. The workshop also addressed the need to promote transparency and public access to information on land.

15. Participants were updated on an ongoing Working Party on Land Administration study on fraud in real estate registration and conveyancing, which mapped the best practices available to monitor and prevent unlawful transactions in real property.

16. The Real Estate Market Advisory Group summarized the findings of the study "Policy framework for sustainable real estate markets: principles and guidance for the development of a country's real estate sector", which had been released as a publication in April 2010.

17. The issue of transparency as it related to justice and fairness was also considered, as those topics had been addressed by pertinent legal instruments of intergovernmental organizations, including the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land and other Natural Resources.

18. *Main conclusions and recommendations:*

(a) Fraud in real estate conveyancing was a real threat to land administration authorities. Solutions were available to ensure the security of transactions through better monitoring, training schemes for civil servants and restrictions in access to information for anonymous users;

(b) Internet-based land administration services required that authorities raised knowledge and awareness of its potential uses. Public awareness of the advantages of e-cadastrals, e-registers and e-conveyancing had to be raised in order to guarantee acceptance of those systems by the general public;

(c) The interoperability of the different systems and the implementation of international standards were critical to the success of the implementation of information technology (IT) strategies, as was the vocational training of staff involved in those activities;

(d) Stepwise implementation of new electronic systems should be preferred, as the implementation phase normally lasted longer than expected. In some countries, steps could be taken to move forward towards the facilitation of e-conveyancing once all digital information on land and real estate became available;

(e) Solutions to the implementation of IT reforms should always be contextually defined. They should involve a comprehensive analysis of the potential trade-offs involved, such as the contrast between the principle of cost-recovery and the right to universal access to public information, the operational advantages of web-based services versus the advantages of traditional ways of delivery of services and the potential of public-private partnerships; and

(f) Policy guidance related to transparency was fundamental for the development of real estate markets, real estate valuation and risk assessment.

III. Workshop on Enhancing Urban Performance: How effective urban planning can lead to greener urban communities and economies and promote social cohesion

19. The workshop, organized by UNECE in cooperation with the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic, was held in Prague on 3 and 4 May 2010.

20. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Austria, Belarus, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo (in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

21. The following international organizations and financial institutions were represented: the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the World Bank. Representatives of non-governmental organizations and the private sector were also in attendance.

22. The objective of the workshop was to discuss and review examples and best practices of successful integrative approaches to urban planning, with a particular focus on the main challenges for up-to-date urban planning, such as reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for urban areas, increasing social cohesion and reducing urban poverty. In particular, participants of the workshop addressed such issues as urban planning and infrastructure and their role in achieving sustainable development, application of a comprehensive approach to spatial planning, energy efficiency and affordable housing and strengthening social cohesion.

23. *Main conclusions and recommendations:*

(a) Cities in Europe accounted for 75 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 80 per cent of the population; they were engines of economic growth, technical

innovation and cultural diversity. However, despite their economic significance and growth prospects, cities were facing a growing number of complex challenges, reduced economic performance, environmental degradation, migration, lack of social cohesion and increased unemployment, high environmental impacts and the effects of climate change. To encompass that complexity, Governments needed to increase urban performance by adopting an approach that integrated different dimensions of urban planning, thus addressing those economic, environmental and social challenges in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. The CHLM contributed to facilitating the dissemination of best practices and developed guidance on sustainable patterns in human settlements development;

(b) Although an integrated approach to urban planning was important, a return to sectoral policy solutions was still part of urban planning practice in many countries. The fragmentation of local governments was a constraint to an effective implementation of urban plans, thus leading to delayed investment in infrastructure and in essential urban services, as well as to reliance on developer-driven urban regeneration schemes;

(c) City transport was one of the greatest challenges to be dealt with. Local authorities should not wait for private initiatives to take place, but rather developed a strategic approach to that issue themselves. Urban regeneration should be linked to different transport schemes, including car-sharing schemes that could serve as an example of innovative approaches within an overall city-transport policy;

(d) There was a significant potential for improving the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock by decreasing the energy consumption related to heating. Both technical measures and improved household behavioural models should be applied in a holistic way to reach the objectives in that area. In some countries, examples of energy efficiency in public buildings could have a multiplier effect, thus contributing to achieving energy-efficiency objectives on a broader scale;

(e) Affordable housing was a fundamental part of the sustainable development of any city, and a well-functioning housing market provided important information about the structure of prices in a city. However, a significant number of people could not afford the housing on the market. Therefore, social housing was a very important part of public services and an efficient tool for ensuring social cohesion and enabling vulnerable groups to live in decent conditions;

(f) Spatial planning was a key tool for creating a more rational territorial organization of land uses and balancing the demands for development with the need to protect the environment, as well as to achieve social and economic objectives. Spatial planning strategies had to be based on reliable performance data in different sectors of economy, as well as on territorial information and analyses. Inclusive spatial planning should become a standard practice and emphasis needed to be placed on a collaborative culture of planning, in partnership with local actors and the involvement of people living in a given area;

(g) There was a significant potential for closer cooperation between the European Union and CHLM. The development of that potential could be discussed during the seventy-first session of the Committee, to be held in September 2010.

IV. Workshop on Housing finance: beyond Subprime

24. The workshop was organized jointly by UNECE and the European Federation of Building societies. It was held in Munich, Germany, from 17 to 19 May 2010.

25. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Algeria, Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam.

26. Representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the private sector were also in attendance.

27. The main objective of the workshop was to evaluate the effects of the financial crisis on the national housing markets and to discuss institutional reforms that could reduce the volatility of financial markets.

28. Policymakers and experts analysed the impact of the financial crisis on the housing sector, its consequences for the welfare of households and ways to increase consumer confidence in the UNECE region. They agreed that common to all financing systems was the need for stable economic conditions and for a legal and fiscal environment conducive to an efficient allocation of capital. To achieve stability, one prerequisite was to set up a modern system of supervision of the banking sector's soundness and safety. Other important areas to promote policy change included improved risk assessment of investments, regulation of commercial and mortgage loan institutions, transparent and fair taxation systems and environmental sustainability of the housing sector, as well as the promotion of microfinance to assist low-income groups of the population.

29. *Main conclusions and recommendations:* Participants of the workshop agreed that more attention was needed not only on implementing the regulation for financial markets, but also on setting up better capital allocation risk models, increased transparency in access to information for consumers, certification for energy efficiency in buildings and achieving a more balanced distribution of housing loans between refurbishing of existing housing stock and the construction of new dwellings. Principles of good governance were deemed to be a major component of sound international finance and were seen as essential for the stability and integrity of financial systems. International organizations and standard setters, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, had recently launched several reviews on the need to improve corporate governance and supervision as a consequence of the current crisis, and were updating their principles and guidelines accordingly.

30. Overall, there was a consensus among policymakers and experts on the need to discuss institutional changes and new forms of multilateral cooperation that would help make the real estate sector more stable. Improved policies and action in those areas should contribute to strengthening citizens' trust in public authorities and help universalize access to security of tenure for vulnerable groups. As an example, the constructive role of non-governmental organizations that worked with local governments to provide financing and technical assistance for the development of affordable housing was mentioned. In general, solutions should be based on a balance between a market-based housing finance system and efficient use of public subsidies, which should always reflect the economic situation and traditions of a particular country. In that respect, UNECE country profiles on the housing sector were mentioned as a useful tool for Governments to analyse their housing policies, strategies and institutional and financial frameworks for the housing sector and to compare them with existing international trends. The UNECE study on "Housing Finance Systems for Countries in Transition: Principles and Examples" was also mentioned as a useful tool offering an in-depth analysis of the most common housing finance models in the UNECE region and providing policymakers with an instrument to evaluate those models.

V. Workshop on “Real property cadastre and registration services in the ECE region: the impact of ‘E-government’ reforms”

31. The workshop, which was held on 8 and 9 June 2010 in Minsk, was organized by UNECE in cooperation with the State Committee on Property of Belarus, which hosted the event.

32. The workshop was attended by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Italy, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

33. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme and the UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group attended the workshop.

34. The objective of the workshop was to analyse the institutional reforms that had taken place in the UNECE region, to ensure widespread use of information technologies (IT) by land administration authorities and to ascertain the impact of e-government reforms.

35. Over recent decades, many countries in the UNECE region had successfully converted their land registration and real property records from large collections of paper documents into computerized forms that could be accessed via the Internet. To be used effectively, such e-government instruments required appropriate legislation and a well-extended information network, encompassing all regional administrations within member States. At the core was the need for information held in any locality to be compatible and interoperable with the broader national system. While many countries in the UNECE region had already successfully set up e-government technologies in land administration, others were only at the early stages; discrepancies also existed between countries in the allocation of responsibilities among government authorities at the national, regional and local levels, which called for enhanced international cooperation and for sharing experience.

36. Participants in the workshop stressed the importance of holding up the principles of uniformity, compatibility, trustworthiness and transparency in data management to ensure better integration of information resources and the successful implementation of the “one-stop-shop” mechanism for real property registration. Representatives of Belarus shared their experience in the implementation of e-government reforms aimed at improving the integration of all national information services. Those reforms, which had been promoted in line with increased professional training for registrars, had contributed to the successful registration of an increasing number of real property units (over 5 million units as of 2010). Discussions during the workshop also focused on the analysis of issues pertaining to the process of immovable property formation, as well as the functions and goals of address registries to improve land administration in the UNECE region.

37. *Main conclusions and recommendations:*

(a) A successful integration of national information would result in diminished costs for Governments and time savings for consumers. It would also contribute to increased transparency in data management and improvements in combating fraud, and would accelerate the implementation of the “one stop shop” principle as it related to land administration;

(b) The integration of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) was an enabler for e-government reforms. Governments should create the conditions, in each particular national context, for the centralization of responsibilities in one agency that would administer key registers with one common database. The cadastral virtual office was

a good example of the successful application of the “one-stop-shop” principle to land administration, which was in accordance with the principle of extraterritoriality for State registration and had become widely used by the population;

(c) It was important to have a long-term consistent strategy concerning the pricing policy for access to information, as it would determine the feasibility of investments in new technologies;

(d) Pending challenges to integrating national information were much less related to insufficient technical capacities, but rather to the need to update national legislation. When collecting new information in the digital format, efforts should be made to guarantee the interoperability of existing IT applications and to update national legislation in ways that would allow for smooth exchanges of information among authorities;

(e) The Address Registers were considered key registers for many Governments in the UNECE region, although their development differed from country to country. In some countries, the lack of a complete cartographical digital basis for all the national territory, especially in rural areas, might be a hindrance. Good practice experience suggested that addresses had to be unambiguous, easy to locate and kept up to date. The setting up of a specific legal framework for Address Registers was also a requirement. Because land administration authorities were also often in charge of those registers, they played an important role in their partnership with municipalities (who were often in charge of updating addresses) and with other intergovernmental bodies (for instance, in Belarus, address registers were also used by population registers, tax-payer registers and business registers, among others). The online interconnection of base registers and their mutual compliance could ensure that advantages for citizens and government bodies were realized;

(f) Some semantic problems needed to be solved (i.e., the use of the same definitions for different objects in different jurisdictions) if the integration of national information was to be successful. Those should be corrected, in line with appropriate changes in legislation, to ensure the compatibility of organizations that had different traditions and methodologies of work. The uses of existing international standards (e.g., those derived from the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) directive in the European Union) should be encouraged where possible.
