

## **ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS  
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### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE SIXTIETH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

#### **The UNECE reform process**

#### **Options to reform the Committee on Human Settlements and its work**

With 2005 being the year of the UNECE reform, the Committee at its 66th session, is invited to consider and discuss some proposals put forward by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau on how the Committee could be reformed to better satisfy the needs of member states on (i) a possible new name for the Committee, (ii) the frequency of its sessions and (iii) how the Committee could streamline its activities putting emphasis on those ones which have a high profile. Furthermore the Committee may wish to take into account the outcome of the external evaluation report on the state of the UNECE and comments of the secretariat to the report and annexed to this discussion paper.

#### **The Committee's name**

1. In order to improve the Committee's visibility and better reflect the issues that it is dealing with, it may be the appropriate time to change its name. The following is suggested:

(i) Committee on Housing and Land Management

2. It will continue to provide a forum for senior policy makers to formulate housing, land and urban policies and strategies. It will encourage practical implementation by organizing seminars, workshops and advisory missions and providing a forum for sharing experiences and good practices. By so working the Committee is supporting the economic and social stabilization of EECCA and SEE by suggesting innovative ways of cooperation between different levels of government.

#### **The Committee's sessions every two years**

3. Annual meetings are not necessary for a body which will concentrate on a selected number of programmes. Instead of dedicating much secretariat time for organizing the annual sessions, more emphasis should be given to high profile substantive work like the country profiles on the housing sector and land administration reviews. These activities should be further developed and strengthened through peer reviews and enhanced follow-up in the implementation of recommendations. The Committee's meetings would consequently take place every second year. It would be supported by an active enlarged Bureau which would meet at least twice a year to

follow the work and provide the necessary assistance to the secretariat for the smooth running of the activities. The Working Party's session is already taking place every two years, and could continue to do so, alternating with the Committee.

#### Changes in the work directions

4. During its annual session, held in September 2004, the Committee on Human Settlements conducted a preliminary reassessment of its strategic directions and evaluated its core activities namely: the country profiles programme on the housing sector for countries with economies in transition, the land administration activities, and the policy guidelines on social housing, condominium management and urban planning.

5. Member states concluded that the Committee's overall strategic directions as depicted in the Committee's *Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, adopted at the UNECE ministerial meeting on human settlements in 2000, are still valid. At the same time, they agreed that the Committee's work would benefit from some shift in emphasis within the overall strategic directions in order to better account for the new developments in human settlements. Many of these were highlighted at the first regional implementation meeting to follow-up on the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in January 2004.

6. The Committee recommended to put further focus on:

- Addressing the concerns of the Committee's member states from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA region) as well as South East Europe;
- Stressing the implementation of the Committee's policy work in member countries, in particular through providing assistance to countries in the implementation of the recommendations extended in the country profiles on the housing sector as well as the policy guidelines developed by the Committee and Working Party;
- Strengthening the regional contribution to (i) the implementation of the Habitat Agenda including the campaigns on secure tenure and urban governance launched by UN Habitat and (ii) the follow-up to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and (iii) the Millennium Development Goals;
- Further incorporating the concerns of the poor and socially disadvantaged in the Committee's as well as the Working Party's work;
- Promoting an integrated approach for achieving sustainable human settlements in combining the different instruments available within housing, land administration and urban planning.

7. If the ECE member states consider that the ECE activities on the housing sector reforms in countries in transition, social housing for the poor, integrated spatial planning for sustainable development, and land administration to protect property rights in land are important for the UNECE region, consideration should be given to how to maintain and strengthen the network of housing and urban planning authorities, as well as land administration officials in the UNECE organizational structure.

#### Cooperation with other organizations

8. The Committee has built partnerships with other organizations to create synergies, to avoid overlapping of activities and, to make cost efficient use of scarce resources undertaking joint activities with: UN-HABITAT, the Council of Europe (including CEMAT) the Council of Europe Development Bank, The World Bank, the Stability Pact, UNDP and the International

Finance Corporation (IFC) as well as with relevant NGOs such as: the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS), International Union of Tenants (IUT), International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) and, International Council of Women(ICW) .

9. There are several concrete outcomes of this collaboration such as studies, guidelines, jointly organized workshops or jointly organized in-depth discussions. These kinds of cooperative activities agreements can be continued on an ad hoc basis.

#### Activities to be cancelled

10. In order to be able to concentrate on its work directions as stated above the Committee may wish to consider to further streamline its programme of work in cancelling the following programme elements: (i) *development of human settlements statistics* and (ii) *major trends characterizing human settlements development*.

11. Data is already collected and compiled within the country profile and land administration reviews through national and international sources and, on the other hand the Bulletin of Housing Statistics is regularly updated and issued on the web including the human settlements database. If the questionnaire for compiling the Bulletin on housing statistics could be further streamlined, (the questionnaire was already revised in 2002) to collect data more relevant to the Committee's work programme and in particular to the CP, this activity could serve the double purpose for collecting data for the CP and at the same time for the Human Settlement database.

12. Concerning the “ major trends” programme element, it does not anymore reflect the priorities of the Committee as stated above with regard to organizing conferences on urban and regional research. On the other hand the Committee should continue to work on very concrete urban planning policies and their implementation rather than on research issues. This can be done through the existing programme element: improving urban environmental performance. The exchange of experience in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals as well as of the WSSD Plan of Implementation as stated so far in the programme of work, should be integrated in the Committee's activities rather than as a separate activity itself.

#### Resources

13. The secretariats' resources employed to service the Committee and its Working Party are a total of 2,6 professionals, supported by the Regular Budget (RB). All resources are fully utilized and even overused to respond to the requests from countries. In addition the secretariat hires consultants through the Trust Fund to carry out those tasks which need expertise not available in the secretariat. In addition, countries provide experts in kind for some specific programme elements.

14. Donor contributions to the Human Settlements Trust Fund (TF) allowed all these years to have funds for assisting countries in transition to participate in the Committee and Working Party sessions as well as in numerous workshops, other meetings or task forces. It also allowed to hire consultants, as well as for the secretariat to service meetings outside Geneva or to carry out fact finding missions and to buy equipment. Further contributions to it on a regular basis are needed, as it is unlikely that the Regular Budget allocation will increase in the future.

## ANNEX

### Evaluation of the experts on the basis of the questionnaire

1. The ad Hoc Informal Meeting of the Commission held on 14 July 2005, in considering the external evaluation report on the State of the UNECE, established an “intergovernmental open-ended negotiation Committee” to prepare a working plan on UNECE reform based on the findings of the report.

2. Concerning human settlements activities the report recommended that “human settlements activities receive little support from Member States, they can be discontinued”: However on the relevance and comparative advantage of the work of the Committee on Human Settlements the External Evaluation Report states the following positive aspects:

- (a) “The Member States considered the comparative advantage of the Committee on Human Settlements to be that it is the only inter-governmental body related to human settlements that operates in a permanent basis across the entire region of Europe”;
- (b) “Other human settlements organizations working on the European level do not incorporate governments per se, rather they are composed of members of the academic and research community or the private sector actors”.
- (c) “Some of the work carried out by the Committee, such as the recent publication of a housing country profile for Russia is indeed unique and does not compete directly with other organizations”;
- (d) “The inclusion of non-EU governments in the work of the Committee on Human Settlements has been particularly important, since the countries with the greatest need for housing-related support are in fact the Central and Eastern European countries”.
- (e) “It should be noted that the Committee serves as a multilateral forum that encourages policy dialogue between EU and non-EU countries and plays an essential role in elaborating housing policy.”
- (f) “Member States further assert that the Committee is better equipped to undertake long-term initiatives....”
- (g) “The ECE Committee on Human Settlements seems to address the regional challenges and specificities of the European political, social, economic and cultural context more efficiently than UN-Habitat”.
- (h) “The Committee also embraces a cross-sectoral approach, designed to take the different policy spheres of environment, energy, transport, consumption patterns and social cohesion into account”.

3. At the same time, the report noted that according to the replies of the questionnaire the activities of the Committee on Human Settlements and its Urban Management Advisory Network (HUMAN) got 10.7% of high priority ranking and 42,9 % of low priority ranking. On the basis of these figures, the report recommended to discontinue the human settlements activities. However useful products like the housing country profile could in the future, be carried out by the UNECE statistical division.“

### Comments of the secretariat of the Environment and Human Settlements Division

3. It seems that in drawing recommendations, only quantitative indicators (para.2) were taken into consideration, while the whole range of qualitative indicators (para.1) were not considered.

4. The programme of the Country Profiles on the Housing Sector is similar to the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR), which have the highest priority in the environment sub-programme. It is not a review based on statistics, it is a country-oriented policy study on institutional, legal, and housing finance aspects, with practical policy conclusions and recommendations. This activity could not be carried out in the statistical or any other Division of the ECE secretariat. It needs a network of housing and spatial planning authorities to guide the work of and provide members for international expert teams, and support the implementation process through follow up activities (workshops, etc.). This network (originally, the Group of Experts on Housing) was established back in 1947 and, later developed into the Committee on Human Settlements. After the Habitat-II Conference in 1996, the Committee established the Urban Management Advisory Network (HUMAN) to meet the need for a stronger cooperation with the NGO-s and the private sector. In fact the Committee was the first ECE PSB, which established such a type of cooperation. This Advisory Network plays an important role in assisting ECE member states in the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

5. The Committee has developed a streamlined process of programme formulation and implementation. It is probably the only ECE PSB, which adopted a millennium strategy for its activities and, on the basis of the priorities defined in the strategy, the Committee prepared a set of regional guidelines like e.g. on Land Administration, on Housing Finance, on Housing Condominiums and on Social Housing. Practical implementation of the guidelines is supported at the national level, through country profiles studies, land administration reviews, seminars and workshops, contributing significantly to establishing democratic governance at the municipal level and to enhancing social cohesion, poverty elimination and political stability.

6. One of the indications of the support for the Committee's activities is the fact that the Committee has its own Trust Fund (Trust Fund on Human Settlements) since 30 years. ECE member states, including countries in transition continue to make regular contributions.

7. The Working Party on Land Administration is a network of land administration authorities, which was established under the Committee a decade ago to provide support to ECE member countries, in particular those with economies in transition. Expert advice is provided for the development and harmonization of land administration systems that protect property rights in land and constitute an infrastructural and information basis for development of property markets, urban planning, rural land management and protection of the environment. Without an efficiently functioning land administration system there can be no real housing market or access to social housing for the poor, no effective economic development, taxation or environment protection policy. As the awareness of the connection between property rights and poverty reduction has increased, the importance of supporting the development of effective and fair land administration systems has become more obvious. There are indications that other UN Regional Commissions are considering establishing a similar body.

8. Upon request of Governments, the Working Party performs Land Administration Reviews (similar to Environmental Performance Reviews and Country Profiles on the Housing Sector) that provide independent and unbiased analysis and recommendations for development of land administration systems and land markets. The Working Party has created a streamlined governance. Its sessions are convened on a biannual basis. The Bureau of the Working Party consists of representatives from 12 ECE member states, which is an evidence of the priority of the Working Party's activities for the ECE region.