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Forest in eastern Europe: developing a private sector

While the rest of Europe is steadily progressing towards sustainable forest management, east European countries are facing many challenges, following the restitution of forests from the State to their previous owners, FAO said at the European Forestry Commission meeting (23-26 May) in Zvolen, Slovakia.

General recovery

Many of the countries restructuring their economic and social system from central planning to the market system have made huge progress in developing a private forestry sector and adapting their institutions. The State has returned forests to former owners or their heirs; changes have been made in policy and legislation for greater



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private-sector involvement in the forestry sector; and forest institutions, notably State forest services, are adapting to the market economy. As a result, the forest sector in Eastern Europe is benefiting from a general recovery. Production of forest products is growing and trade of forest products with Western Europe is increasing significantly.

Many new forest owners are seeking new skills and resources to manage their forest in a sustainable way. However, their holdings are so small that many owners cannot afford professional advice. There is no long established tradition of forest management, nor institutional advice and support. As a result, forest owners are often tempted to sell all the timber to the first buyer, and then abandon active and responsible management.

Other challenges

Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe urgently request support for policy changes and institutional reform, and could benefit from the experience of the new EU members in adapting to profound changes in the social and economic environment.

Increased efforts are needed to combat forest fire and support forest law enforcement.

Greater demand for social and environmental

benefits from forests, such as water management, soil erosion control and leisure, is expected. Improved policy coordination across sectors will be indispensable, according to FAO.

FAO and UNECE are working together with other international organizations and the countries to assist in solving the problems. *

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Moldova joins E-road Agreement

On 25 May the Republic of Moldova acceded to the European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR), increasing to 34 the number of States Contracting Parties to this Agreement.

E-road network

The AGR, which was done in 1975 and became effective in 1983, provides the legal framework for the construction and development of a coherent international road network, the E-road network. The Agreement identifies the E-roads, or arteries that channel major international traffic flows throughout the UNECE region and establishes the minimum uniform technical conditions those roads must respect as well as a distinguishing number for each E-road.



In addition to the major road-traffic arteries in Western, Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the AGR now includes main international roads in the Caucasus and Central Asia. *

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... in the Balkans and South-Eastern Europe

Representatives of customs authorities, transport associations and the transport industry attended a seminar for the countries in the Balkan and South-East European region which took place on 11-12 May in Sofia (Bulgaria), organized by the UNECE TIR secretariat in cooperation with the TIR Executive Board (TIRExB) and the National Customs Agency of Bulgaria with the support of the Association of the Bulgarian Enterprises for International Road Transport and Roads (AEBTRI).

In his opening address the Director General of the National Customs Agency of Bulgaria, Mr. Assen Assenov, stated that international transport cannot function without the well-functioning TIR system.



TIR *cont.*

The seminar concluded, in particular, that it is important for the facilitation of international transport and trade that the TIR Convention be implemented in the entire region, in particular in Bosnia



left to right: Mr. Georgi Grigorov, Deputy Director General, National Customs Agency, Bulgaria, Mr. Poul Hansen, TIR Secretary, UNECE, Mr. Plamen Tzalkov, Secretary-General, Association of the Bulgarian Enterprises for International Road Transport and Roads (AEBTRI)

and Herzegovina and in Montenegro, and that the Convention be applied correctly, in particular in relation to the correct use of the TIR Carnet and the approval and use of approved vehicles under the TIR Convention.

Further efforts should be made to avoid unnecessary and unjustified costs experienced in some countries in the region by the imposition of using middlemen, as well as to actively undertake efforts to combat fraud in the TIR system and to share experiences on this issue. *

Out of 3.2 million TIR Carnets distributed globally in 2005, more than 1.5 million were distributed to the countries in the Balkan and South-East European region.

The TIR Convention is an international Agreement administered by UNECE devised to facilitate, through the use of an international

Customs document (TIR Carnet) the international movement of goods transported by vehicles or containers under Customs seals and to provide

the required Customs security and guarantees. The Convention has 66 Contracting Parties.

For more information contact Poul Hansen (poul.hansen@unece.org).

Coming up ...

29-30 May

Steering Committee of the Energy Efficiency 21 Project

31 May

Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency Investments for Climate Change Mitigation

29-30 May

TIR Executive Board

30 May-2 June

Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport

1 June

Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention 1975

31 May-2 June

Working Group on Water and Health

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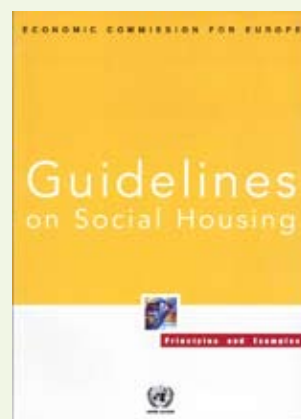
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Off the press ... Guidelines on Social Housing

Given the increasing challenges faced by the socially vulnerable in the housing sector and the importance of affordable housing for socially cohesive societies, countries of the UNECE region are beginning to realize the need for a renewed and stronger role of the state in the provision of social housing. However, in order for the provision of social housing to be efficient and effective, countries have called for a better sharing of the experience on social housing policies and practices as well as improved guidance to policymakers through well-documented information on these policies and practices.

The Guidelines on Social Housing are designed to enable policymakers to assess the various policy options currently available for the provision of social housing. They address the institutional, legal and economic frameworks for social housing and experience with social housing design. They analyse the role of social housing policies for society at large. They also include relevant and well-researched information on instruments available for the financing and provision of social housing.

Available from the UNECE Information Unit (see address below).

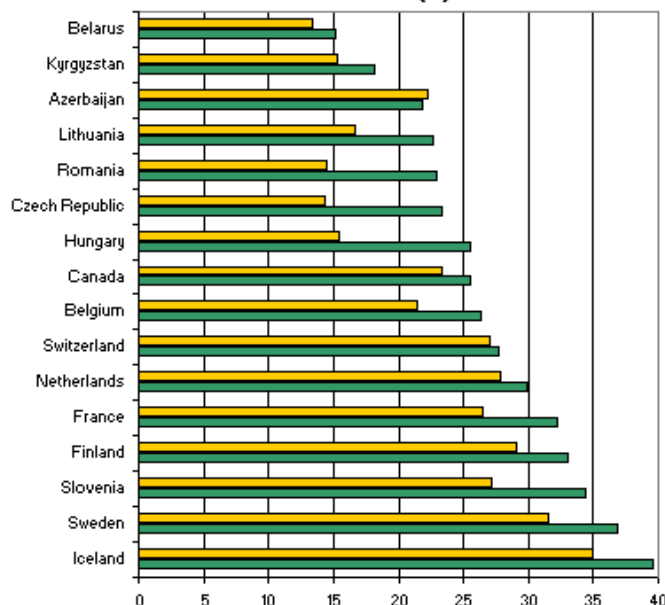


Facts and figures

The decline of marriages

The last decades have seen a decline of marriages in UNECE countries. This is reflected by the increase in the share of never married persons in the total population aged 18+. This situation can be partially explained by changing economic conditions as well as an increase in the popularity of consensual unions. In Europe the percentage of never married people has increased by up to 10% (Hungary) over the last 14 years. In 2004, the observed share of never married people ranged between 22% and 39%.

Share of never married persons over population aged 18+ in selected UNECE countries (%).



Source: UNECE Gender statistics database, compiled from official national and international (Eurostat) sources

Note: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, data in 2004 refer to 2000