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**Review of the programme of work for 2018-2019 and
Report of the work of the Bureau of the Working Party**

Fraud in Land Administration Systems

Note by the Bureau of the Working Party

Summary

This information note presents the preliminary results of a study that was prepared by the WPLA bureau. In 2018, the Working Party initiated a follow-up study to the 2011 study¹ on “Fraud in Land Administration Systems” through a questionnaire to analyse the current state of play in the Region. A paper with the results will be produced later in 2019.

The Working Party is invited to take note of this information.

¹ <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=24802>

1. At the Working Party on Land Administration's Fifth session (*Geneva, 19–20 November 2007*), the delegation of the United Kingdom introduced the issue of fraudulent use of electronic land registration data and related incidents of identity theft (ECE/HBP/WP.7/10, para. 17). That study was based on the surveys completed by UNECE countries on online access to land registration information and was carried out by the United Kingdom with subsequent analysis by the WPLA Bureau. The document's objectives were to identify good practices in the detection and prevention of fraud in land registration systems due to the public electronic availability of land and owner information in UNECE countries. It elaborated on the survey findings in three main areas – accessibility of systems, experience of fraud and counter-measures. The document argued that to detect, prevent and deter fraud, internal controls and checks should be strengthened and sanctions should be imposed. Furthermore, it argued for the necessity of changing public and staff attitudes to create an anti-fraud culture. Almost all respondents agreed that sharing intelligence with other jurisdictions would be helpful, at least to identify common threats and compare best practices for detecting and preventing fraud.

2. This information note presents the preliminary results of a follow-up study which are based on the surveys completed by 37 ECE countries.

3. According to the follow up survey, all respondents hold land title registration information in a computerized/electronic format. Since the 2007 survey, there has been a slight shift towards countries limiting what information is open to public inspection. However, there has not been an increase in the limits on what information can be made available electronically.

4. 90% of respondents make property-related information available to the public online which is up from 60% in 2007. There has also been a substantial increase in the number of respondents whose organizations either require online applicants to register their details before being supplied with information or who have another method of identifying online applicants. Where information is available online to anonymous applicants, it is limited according to over half of respondents, and there have been some marked increases in the limiting of information in all categories with the exception of proprietors' details.

5. 52% of respondents consider that registration fraud in their jurisdiction is decreasing which is a significant change from 2007 when only 9% of respondents believed it was decreasing. Only 3% believe that registration fraud is increasing. There is a good basis for this belief – 66% of respondents now identify attempted fraudulent registrations, up from 28% in 2007 and 54% of respondents are monitoring trends in fraudulent registration. Significantly, most respondents said that they were not identifying any significant trends in fraudulent activities since the introduction of electronic services, nor were they identifying any clear links between fraudulent trends and the use of electronic services with only 3% saying that there had been increased fraudulent activity linked to electronic services.

6. 77% of respondents have now developed methods of detecting/preventing potentially fraudulent activities, an increase of 30% since 2007. 96% believe those methods have been very or fairly successful and 64% are regularly reviewing, evaluating and improving those measures.

7. In 2007 almost all respondents agreed that sharing intelligence with other jurisdictions would be helpful, at least to identify common threats and compare best practices for detecting and preventing fraud. It is therefore surprising that only 45% of respondents said that they have a network of key organizations in their own jurisdictions that coordinates efforts to combat fraud. No single organisation can prevent fraud and working with a range of partners can help to identify threats, develop strategies and implement counter-measures. An even higher number of respondents to this survey thought that sharing intelligence across the UNECE region would be helpful in combating fraud.

8. It is the recommendation of the WPLA Bureau that work be undertaken to investigate how this could work in practice.