



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/HBP/2006/4
10 July 2006

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Sixty-seventh session
Geneva, 18–20 September 2006
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

DRAFT DECLARATION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

**ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN DISTRESSED AREAS
IN THE UNECE REGION**

Prepared by the Bureau in consultation with the secretariat

The High-level Meeting is expected to adopt a Declaration on Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Areas in the UNECE region. The Declaration recognizes the significant role of housing, spatial planning and land administration policies in safeguarding social cohesion in the UNECE region and in the promotion of affordable and adequate housing and the security of all forms of tenure. The Declaration defines priorities for the future work of the Committee on Housing and Land Development in the context of the ECE Strategy for Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century and in line with the Work Plan on ECE Reform.

DRAFT DECLARATION
ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN DISTRESSED AREAS
IN THE UNECE REGION

Introduction

1. The physical environment is important for community cohesion and social interaction. Despite the fact that some UNECE countries have accumulated a wide range of experiences with socially oriented housing programmes and planning practices, in many parts of the UNECE region disadvantaged and deteriorating neighbourhoods lag far behind. In many countries of the region, the upkeep of the multi-family housing stock is becoming ever more urgent, as this type of housing stock represents the majority of all dwellings. Effective social housing and land management policies accompanied by community development can help to foster supportive networks and relationships of trust.

Main issues

2. Until recently, it was usually in areas with a large concentration of the working poor and immigrants that social and community support systems were needed to maintain adequate living conditions and levels of social integration. Recently, however, areas of more extreme, multiple deprivations have emerged in many parts of the UNECE region. In some neighbourhoods, persistent high unemployment, poor housing, low educational attainment, high crime rates and other socio-economic problems interact to generate decline and distress.

3. Shrinking public resources and the process of economic transformation, in particular in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe, pose considerable challenges to the provision of affordable and adequate housing. In many of these countries, the prevailing reliance on market forces has not been sufficient to compensate for the decline of the state's role in the housing sector. Often privatization of large segments of the multi-family housing stock, built mainly in the period 1960–1990, has created many problems for the new owner-occupants in regard to management and upkeep. The availability of affordable and decent housing is crucial for individuals' well-being as well as for ensuring a socially cohesive society.

4. A good land administration system can guarantee ownership and security of all types of tenure, and it supports land and property taxation; provides security for credit; helps to develop and monitor land markets; facilitates the management of state-owned land; improves urban planning and infrastructure development; and provides statistical data in support of good governance.

5. Spatial planning has to cope with the expansion of existing urban areas to improve the local social and economic environment, with migration by young people from rural areas into urban areas,

and with ageing populations. Informal settlements are typically the product of an urgent need for housing, notably by the urban poor, migrants, displaced persons and refugees. They are characterized by and the result of severe economic and social problems. The improvement of living conditions in informal settlements is one of the most complex and pressing challenges facing many UNECE countries today.

Therefore,

WE, MINISTERS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION ATTENDING THE SIXTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE UNECE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT IN GENEVA ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2006,

Recalling, as is stated in the UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century, that social cohesion is a process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among different groups of the population,

Aware that a failure to establish a political, economic and social environment conducive to a stable and adequate standard of living for all nationalities and ethnic groups in a country would contribute to higher societal costs; political instability; urban insecurity; ethnic conflicts; problems related to migrants, refugees and displaced persons; and the emergence of an underclass, and might threaten the strength of the economic system itself,

Noting that distressed areas continue to evolve, since governments have in many instances been too slow to implement policies to address challenges related to social cohesion in such areas,

Convinced that in the context of current demographic trends in the UNECE region, which are characterized by ageing populations and by an increase in migratory movements, policies relating to social cohesion and security should be at the heart of government strategies, which often requires significant changes in the working relations and distribution of responsibilities among government and non-government bodies and organizations, as well as in setting up effective public/private partnerships,

Recognizing that the management, upkeep and refurbishment of multi-family housing stock has become a major problem in the UNECE region, which implies considerable and imminent material and capital losses and social costs, while at the same time it is an opportunity to improve the quality of life, increase community cohesion and strengthen the local economy, and

Recognizing also that spatial information systems should be re-engineered to become increasingly open and public, from the highest level of government to the community level, in order to ensure equal access to land and real property to all people, to guarantee ownership and security for all forms of tenure, to facilitate land reform and the functioning of the real property market, and to improve spatial planning, infrastructure development and natural disaster mitigation efforts,

- (i) *Reconfirm* that the UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century continues to be the basis for future programmes of work of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management in order to foster economic and social prosperity, promote neighbourhood regeneration through refurbishment of multi-family housing stock, promote the provision of affordable and adequate housing, and improve the quality of life in the UNECE region;
- (ii) *Commit* ourselves to contributing to social inclusion, social housing development and affordable housing, taking into account the policy recommendations of the UNECE *Guidelines on Social Housing* (2006) and the UNECE *Guidelines on Condominium Ownership of Housing for Countries in Transition* (2003) and through integrating social housing policy with other policies, notably those in the areas of land administration, employment, migration and education;
- (iii) *Support* UNECE work on housing finance for affordable housing;
- (iv) *Stress* that the issue of effective management of the refurbishment of large multi-family housing estates should be addressed by the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management with an emphasis on integrated strategies that include maintenance, refurbishment, energy-saving, urban development and social cohesion;
- (v) *Support* UNECE land management activities aimed at sustainable spatial planning, including issues related to unregulated construction, informal settlements, land reform and access to land for the poor, and the real property market through development of cadastral and land registration systems and modernization of spatial planning systems;
- (vi) *Emphasize* the importance of continuing the exchange of experiences regarding arrangements for public/private partnerships in the housing and land management sectors on the basis of transparent agreements for sharing risks, benefits and rewards, as well as the utilization of multi-sector skills and finance to serve the interests of the public and in particular disadvantaged groups within the population; and
- (vii) *Decide* to convene the next high-level meeting in five years' time in order to assess progress in the implementation of the above commitments.