

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Housing and Land Management

Seventy-fourth session and Ministerial Meeting

Geneva, 7 - 9 October 2013

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Review of the implementation of the programme of work 2012-2013

Thematic discussion on ageing and accessibility in cities

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This informal note provides background information on the thematic discussion on ageing and accessibility in cities as part of the review of the Programme of Work 2012-2013. The thematic discussion will take place on 7 October as part of the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management meeting.

The results of a survey of challenges and priorities in housing and land management (ECE/HBP/2013/2)¹ conducted among ECE member States showed that “lack of access for disabled and aged persons due to physical/architectural barriers” ranked fourth out of 27 potential challenges across the ECE region. Respondents also considered access to barrier-free housing to be one of the priority topics to be addressed by the Committee. Therefore, barrier-free housing was included as objective in the draft strategy for sustainable housing and land management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020 (ECE/HBP/2013/3)².

The rationale of this thematic presentation is to review key challenges and opportunities in the area of population ageing and accessibility, and explore potential activities of the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management to support member States in addressing these challenges.

This note includes information on the speakers and some guiding questions for the discussion following the presentations.

¹ Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32586>

² Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32586>

I. Background

1. Population ageing is the result of increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility and, to a certain extent, migration. It is part of a global long-term development called the “demographic transition”, which leads societies from a regime of high mortality and high fertility to one with low mortality and low fertility. As the large generations born during the time of high fertility are living longer, and the subsequent generations born at the time of fertility decline are smaller, the population as a whole is ageing.

2. In the ECE region, life expectancy at birth has increased notably across the region in the last decade, adding on average three years. Life expectancy at the age or above 65 increased by nearly a year and a half in the same period. In contrast, the average total fertility rate in the ECE region has dropped below the replacement level (2.1 children) to just below 1.8 children per woman in 2010.³

3. Over the last ten years, the ageing of the population was a dominant feature across all ECE countries. In 2010, the number of people aged 65 years or above reached 174.5 million and presently accounts for 14.1 per cent of the region’s total population. This proportion is expected to exceed 20 per cent by 2030. In Germany and Italy, a fifth of the population was 65 years old or above already in 2010, and is projected to reach over a quarter by 2030. This will also be the case in Austria, Finland and Portugal. The median age of the region’s population will move up from 37.6 years in 2012 to 41.8 years by 2030.⁴

4. Population ageing has become an increasing concern in the ECE region as it has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of society, including on economic and social development, sustainability and equity.

II. Ageing and accessibility in housing and cities

5. Population ageing also touches the mandate of the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, in particular in the area of housing and urban development to ensure accessibility, inclusiveness, active ageing and independent living. To meet the needs of older persons, adjustments to the housing stock and the built environment are required. The overall objective is to keep older persons in their neighbourhood and their home as long as possible because the *“nearby environment plays a key role in promoting social inclusion of the elderly. Therefore, there is a strong need that urban planners eliminate barriers and provide basic facilities and public meeting opportunities for older people, such as groceries, post-offices, benches, etc.”*⁵

6. A number of initiatives and programmes for housing stock adjustment and barrier-free urban planning exist across Europe. The WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities, for instance, developed guidelines for age-friendly cities. This includes the importance of

³ UNECE (2012a): Synthesis report on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the UNECE region. Second Review and Appraisal of the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The European Housing Forum (2012): Active Ageing and intergenerational solidarity. The role of housing.

green space, places to rest, age-friendly pavements, safe pedestrian crossings and accessibility of buildings.⁶

7. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS), both adopted in 2002, provide the main policy framework to direct the response to population ageing among ECE member States. Commitments of the RIS make reference to housing and urban development, including commitment number 7 “to strive to ensure quality of life at all ages and maintain independent living, including health and well-being”.⁷

8. The MIIPAA was reaffirmed during the 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration “Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing (ECE/AC.30/2012/3), in September 2012 in Vienna, Austria. Member States agreed to foster the implementation of the ECE RIS/MIPAA by 2017. The declaration addresses accessibility under the policy goal “*Dignity, health and independence in older age are promoted and safeguarded*”, by

- Facilitating access to age-appropriate, affordable and effective high-quality goods and services and improving mobility through age-friendly environments.
- Developing innovative methods and technologies for reliable, affordable and safe support and care of older persons at home.
- Ensuring 'ageing in place' by promoting services and support to the individual and the family to enable older persons to continue living for as long as possible in their own environment and community. These services should take into account the special needs of women, in particular those who are living alone.
- Promoting architectural alterations and innovative housing design aimed at adapting to the changing needs and functional abilities of persons as they age.
- Supporting, by appropriate means, self-help arrangements of older persons for independent or assisted living, including inter-generational housing facilities and acknowledging that individual needs are assessed and properly addressed whether in an institution or at home.⁸

9. ECE serves as the Secretariat to the Working Group on Ageing, established in 2008 and consisting of national focal points on ageing from all ECE members States. The Working Group on Ageing works on implementing the international policy-framework on ageing, set out in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS). Accessible housing and barrier-free cities constitutes a potential area of collaboration between the Working Group on Ageing and the Committee on Housing and Land Management.

10. In the follow-up of the Rio+20 conference, ECE organized a seminar series on Green Economy. The seminar “Building the cities we want” on 26 November 2012 focused on the importance of a “holistic approach to urban development and human settlements [and] an integrated approach to planning and building sustainable cities and urban settlements”. One panel discussion of the seminar focused on age-friendly and accessible cities. The topic generated interest by member States.

⁶ WHO (2007): Global age-friendly cities: a guide.

⁷ UNECE (2002): Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002.

⁸ UNECE (2012b): 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration. Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active Ageing.

IV. Thematic Discussion

11. The results of a survey of challenges and priorities in housing and land management (ECE/HBP/2013/2) conducted among ECE member States showed that “lack of access for disabled and aged persons due to physical/architectural barriers” ranked fourth (out of 27) potential challenges across the ECE region. Respondents considered access to barrier-free housing to be one of the priority topics to be addressed by the Committee.

12. To address the interest of member States in population ageing and accessibility to housing and cities, the thematic discussion “Ageing and accessibility in cities” will be held during the seventy-fourth session of the Committee. Two keynote speakers will deliver presentations on current and future demographic trends in the wider European region and present initiatives on improving accessibility in European cities. The thematic discussion aims at emphasizing the changing needs of an ageing society and how this development will affect housing demand and the accessibility of urban infrastructures. As an outcome, a summary of the discussion, containing recommendations for the future work of the Committee, will be presented to the Committee for adoption.

13. The discussion will be facilitated by Ms. Viviane Brunne, Associate Population Affairs Officer, UNECE Population unit

14. The following speakers have been invited to make an input presentation and are expected to participate:

- a. **Dr. Pierre-Marie Chapon**, Research Directeur, Caisse des dépôts et consignations (ICADE), France

Dr. Chapon has recently finalized a study for the Centre of Strategic Analysis for the Government of France on adapting cities to the needs of an ageing society. He will present the study outcomes, including some best practice examples from France and other European cities.

- b. **Mr. Stéphane Birchmeier**, Assistant Director of the Social Service and head of the Cité-Séniors, City of Geneva, Switzerland

Geneva is a member of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. Mr. Birchmeier will present the network and its efforts to improve social inclusiveness and physical accessibility in cities and then talks about the efforts of the City of Geneva in this regard and its Cité Séniors.

- c. **Ms. Lise Nielsen**, Head of Division, Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs.
- d. **Ms. Vivane Brunne**, Population Unit, UNECE, Geneva

V. Questions for discussion

15. After the input presentations, the Committee is invited to discuss this matter and to address the following questions:

- a. How do you envisage the role of the Committee in supporting implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration in the area of housing and sustainable urban development?
- b. What kind of support do national and local governments in ECE member States need from the Committee to ensure accessibility, inclusiveness, active ageing and independent living of older persons?

- c. Are there certain aspects regarding the accessibility of housing and urban settlements that are of particular interest to your Government and that the Committee should address?

VI. Expected outcome

16. The Committee may take into account developing a set of recommendations for future activities to address the challenges of ageing and accessibility in the cities. Such activities, may include: developing policy guidelines, policy frameworks and action plans; training and capacity building and organising seminars and workshops for exchanging experience and information on best practices.

V. Further Reading

CHAPON, Pierre-Marie (2012): Adapter les villes au vieillissement. Enjeux d'aménagement et de gouvernance, available online at: http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/system/files/etude-icade-vieillesse-urbanisme-pour_mise_en_ligne_1.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

The European Housing Forum (2012): Active Ageing and intergenerational solidarity. The role of housing. Available online at: http://www.iut.nu/EU/IUT_Brussels/Reports_News/ActiveAgeing_Dec2012.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

UNECE (2002): Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 (ECE/AC.23/2002/2/Rev.6), available online at http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/_docs/ece/2002/ECE_AC23_2002_2_Rev6_e.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

UNECE (2012a): Synthesis report on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the UNECE region. Second Review and Appraisal of the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS), available online at http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/country_rpts/Synthesis_report_complete_final__up_dated_.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

UNECE (2012b): 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration. Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active Ageing. ECE/AC.30/2012/3, available online at: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Ministerial_Conference_Vienna/Documents/ECE.AC.30-2012-3.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

UNECE (2012c): Policy Brief on Active Ageing, available online at: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE-WG.1.17.pdf [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

UNECE (2012d): Active Ageing and Quality of Life in Old Age, available online at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=30027> [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

United Nations (2002): The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration, available online at: <http://social.un.org/index/Portals/0/ageing/documents/Fulltext-E.pdf> [last accessed on 6 May 2013]

WHO (2007): Global age-friendly cities: a guide, available online at:
http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/index.html [last accessed on
6 May 2013]